University of Alberta

Teaching on Stolen Ground

by

David Calhoon ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Elementary Education

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Abstract

This thesis employs autobiographical story along with theoretical reflection in an attempt to explore what it might mean to stand in the world as "teacher." Ways in which culture and the indeterminacy of language problematize this search are considered.

Because my teaching life has taken me into First Nations communities from Alaska to the Mexican border, I have had the opportunity to witness story used in ways not traditional in my own culture. In this ongoing inquiry into story and culture, I have become convinced that, in today's postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial landscape, story must play many different roles. The relationships between story, experience, and presence are examined using the power of story to disrupt and de-stabilize, to open questions rather than deliver meaning; this while calling into question the reification of story as the representation of experience. In allowing the stories to jar against each other, I have sought to explore ways in which a metonymic notion of story forces us to re-orient ourselves toward the abyss and the infinite possibilities of our existence.

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Chapter One

Prologue

The Hidden Story and the Wound

This is a story I might have preferred to tell at the end of this text, or not to tell at all. Instead, I am choosing to present it at the beginning, in the manner that many First Nations people give a gift of tobacco, as a sign of respect.

> Graves and reminiscences can neither be transferred nor conquered. (Schutz, 1970, p. 88)

"Private Services for Dr. Frank D. Oswald" is the headline of an obituary located between an announcement for a corset demonstration and an advertisement for the Corner Pharmacy in the Alliance Daily Review (Alliance, Ohio) for February 24, 1908. Near the end of this piece, in a list of "out of town friends who attended the funeral," there appears the name, Miss Annie Oswald. Miss Annie Oswald is/was my grandmother. There is a "deep, dark secret" behind how it came to pass that fourteen year old Annie Oswald was listed as an "out of town friend" in this obituary.

At the age of 17, Annie's mother Jenny met and fell in love with a young man named Frank Oswald. After a whirlwind courtship they eloped and were married. When Frank's parents discovered that their son had married a young woman not of their class, they wasted no time in having the marriage annulled. It was bad enough that my great-grandmother was of a poorer class, but when they found out that, in my grandmother's words, there had been an "Indian in the woodpile" (Jenny's mother had been a Mohawk of the Iroquois Confederacy), the marriage simply could not be permitted. What couldn't be annulled, however, was the fact that Jenny was pregnant.

Frank returned to his family in Alliance and, some years later, attended medical school. He was engaged to be married to a woman of more appropriate social standing when, in the words of the obituary, "he died from brain trouble caused by over work in making preparations for his examinations." My grandmother retained the name Oswald while her mother had reclaimed her maiden name of Hughes.

All of this remained a secret shame, locked in my grandmother's heart, until shortly before her death in

1976. Perhaps, it was because I had become a teacher working in First Nations communities that she decided to tell me of her Mohawk ancestry, a secret she had kept from her own children. It certainly caused, and continues to cause, me to search (and re-search) my understandings of the paths people take in their lives. The autobiographical stories which I have included in this text may, in some sense, have their genesis in my grandmothers hidden story, the story which became a wound in my history and in my culture.

The Journey Continues

For most of my life in this calling I have searched for a place to stand, and a way of being, as "Teacher," in cultures not my own. I would now like to inquire, within the context of my Ph.D. dissertation, into a theoretical and ethical foundation for, and a narrative experience of, teaching and learning in a culture not one's own.

Such issues and experiences might possibly be examined within the more general context of multi-cultural education; indeed, in North America this is often the case. However, to do so ignores the ethical

realities, responsibilities and implications specific to the cultures involved. Although I hope that this inquiry will result in insights applicable to multi/cross-cultural education in general, I am choosing to focus on cross-cultural experiences involving teachers and children in North American settings.

This focus is a result of my own life history. It is rooted strongly in my emotional and intellectual need to understand more deeply what it means to be human and "teacher." In many ways this project is a continuation of a life-long journey which I attempted to describe in my master's thesis. The following "story" is an allegory from that earlier document which I would like to re-submit as re-presenting my hopes and expectations for this "journey towards a better understanding".

A Possibly Analogous Allegory

Red is the color of understanding. Perfect red is the color of perfect understanding. I am sitting in a room which measures 20 feet by 20 feet with a ten foot ceiling height. The room is

filled to a depth of five feet with marbles. The marbles range in color from a very pale pink to what appears to be a deep red. No two of the marbles are exactly the same color but all are shades of red. There are thousands upon thousands of marbles. My task is to find the perfect red; the richest, darkest red marble in the room.

As I look directly in front of me I can see hundreds of marbles within my arm's reach. I quickly pick up a very red marble. This is surely the reddest of reds. I cannot imagine a more red marble. I am pleased with myself for accomplishing my task so quickly and I place the "perfect" red marble safely in my pocket.

I begin to look around for an exit from the room when my eyes are drawn to another extremely red marble. I pick it up and examine it more closely. Upon comparing it with the marble from my pocket I am amazed to discover that this second marble is even redder than the first. I also feel lucky to have discovered my error and to have found the actual perfect red marble

before leaving the room. Or have I? Is this actually and truly the reddest marble?

My confidence is shaken and I feel I must make a more systematic search in order to verify my assumption. I separate out a section of the room by making a furrow with my hand and I begin to look at the marbles on one side of the furrow and move them to the other side after careful examination. Each time I find a marble which is more red than the one in my pocket (and this seems to happen with surprising frequency) I replace the less red one with the more red one.

Because the marbles are so slippery I cannot keep some of the already examined marbles from sliding back in with the unexamined ones as I dig deeper and deeper. Sometimes I pick up a marble and I am almost certain that it is one I had in my pocket some hours earlier. I am then embarrassed to think that I once thought that this marble was the perfect red marble when there were so many obviously "more red" marbles in the room. How naive I was!

I persevere. My diligence somewhat makes up for my imperfect methodology. I work my way across the room examining every marble to the best of my ability. After many hours of careful searching I come to the last corner of the room and work my way through these last marbles. Even though I have replaced the marble in my pocket (the "perfect red marble") thousands of times, I am now near the end of my search and success is at hand.

Upon examining the last marble I notice the seams of a small door in the wall I have just exposed. What good fortune that at the successful completion of my task I should also find the exit from the room! So, with the "perfect red marble" in hand, and an incredible feeling of accomplishment in my heart, I open the door to leave the room.

I am stunned by what I see when I open the door. The door is not an exit but an entry into another chamber. It is huge. It is as large as a coliseum. And it is filled with red marbles, a sea of red marbles. Carl Sagan would have

> trouble grasping the number of red marbles in this room. When I look closely I notice that the marbles, although different shades of red, all appear to be slightly darker, slightly richer, and slightly more "perfect red" than the marble I have in my pocket.
>
> I am daunted by the thought that I will never find the "perfect red marble." Paradoxically, I am also excited, almost euphoric, to realize that as long as I continue to search I will always be able to find ever "more perfect" red marbles. This feeling is accompanied by a sense of awe as I perceive the distant walls of this chamber. I am uncomfortably, but not unpleasantly, aware that what is outside is always infinitely greater than what is inside.(Calhoon, 1989, pp. 78-80)

When I first wrote this in 1989 I was trying to convey a notion of research being driven by an insatiable desire to understand. The desire is insatiable because of the impossibility of absolute understanding and impossible simply because of the infinity of possibilities. While this allegory may speak to my need, rooted in my ignorance, to search

for understanding, it may also say something about the form that search takes.

Whose Story Can I Tell?

I have in the course of this inquiry been drawn into an increasingly auto-biographical narration. This was troubling at first since one of my goals involved the possibility for an increased understanding of "other" cultures, cultures not my own. However, I have come to believe that an autobiographical voice is necessary if I am to avoid the appropriation of the "voices" of those others whose presence I have had the joy of sharing during my teaching life. Anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1994) refers to the necessity of the autobiographical voice:

> Autobiography can...be a condition of (rather than an impediment to) ethnographic objectivity in the sense that it allows the writing subject's actual history and involvement to be considered critically. (p.82)

I see this as also addressing Patti Lather's (1986) examination of the notion of openly ideological research.

Returning to the allegory above, it is the very "slipperiness" of this understand which requires me to re-search my previous assumptions and values, as presented in my autobiographical stories, and to critique my own culture from a point of tension which, although always present between myself and others, seems magnified in cross-cultural situations.

To Whom Do I Listen?

In order to "do" this research ("searching again") I find it necessary to seek insights in a number of directions. The past and present voices from phenomenology, ethnography, hermeneutics, and critical pedagogy all deserve my ear. Classical, modern, and postmodern voices all influence my search. I am compelled to listen to the East and the West, the masculine and the feminine, the powerful and the powerless, the immigrant and the aboriginal, the young and the old, the living and the dead. And I must listen for the silences as well as the words, the fictions as well as the facts. I do this not in order to seek all paths for the "one true path" to understanding, but rather because of my conviction

that each of these voices holds one small piece of an infinitely complex puzzle.

Relationships

Most of all, I find myself searching and researching my experiences of being present in relationships with the people who have populated my life. These relationships are what this dissertation is all about: people who speak, people who listen, people who want to speak but are kept silent, people who cannot find the words in a language not their own, and people (all of us who share this planet) whose own languages lack the words to enable them to fully speak their minds.

For the human beings in these relationships ignorance is unavoidable; it can be reduced but it cannot be eliminated. What we know is finite; what we have yet to learn is infinite. This is good news. Who would want to eliminate ignorance anyway? To do so would end our journey: no more to learn, no more to experience, no more mystery, no more curiosity, no more red marbles. What a depressing thought! While that ignorance humbles us, it also fuels our desire to learn.

Messages

Over the last few years since beginning this inquiry I have visited and had many conversations with people involved with education in First Nations communities. These new and old friends include First Nations parents and children, educators of First Nations ancestry, and educators of European ancestry. During these conversations I have listened to many stories, and told a few as well. These stories, and more particularly the telling and hearing of these stories, have had a strong impact on my assumptions and beliefs about First Nations education, and, in fact, education and teaching in general.

When I began I confidently believed that in this document I would be sharing the stories of these people as well as my own. This proved to be a naive belief. Ultimately, or for now at least, I have discovered that the only stories I can tell are my own stories. However, in the telling of my stories I am hopeful that the reader can perceive in my text the "traces" left on my life by my sharing presence with these people, "traces" which even now continue to cause movement in my thinking.

In addition to shared stories, most of the First Nations people I encountered had things they wanted to say, "messages" for "white people" about the education of their children. While I often find myself ethically unable to tell the story of an other, signed consent forms not withstanding, I also feel ethically bound to pass those "messages" along to my readers. Even with some close and long time First Nations friends I occasionally experience a sense of being perceived as a conduit to an ear into which they rarely have the opportunity to speak, as though in speaking to me they can speak to white people, white academia, and the white governments which exercise so much power over their lives. Regardless of my obvious limitations in this role, I feel obligated to do as much as I possibly can to fulfill it.

Toward this end, and in partial repayment for all the kindness and candor these friends have directed my way over the last four years, I have reserved the last section of this text for the presentation of these messages. In so doing I hope to show my respect for them by allowing them the "last word" in my dissertation.

Chapter Two

Once Upon a Time

> Ultimately I am neither a stylist nor a scientist since I see the tendency of both to reify as distorting rather than enhancing discovery and representation. What that leaves is some stories with reflections. You see I also cannot simply tell the story; I have to think about it and tell the readers my thoughts, hit the reader over the head with the meaning. This is why the people in my tribe write poor fiction: they cannot simply let the story speak for itself; they need to make sure the reader gets the point. We think a lot about experience, sometimes to the point that we eliminate it. (Farella, 1993, p. 14)

Aida in a Yellow Dress

It is the first day of school in La Grulla, Texas. The migrant farm worker families have returned home after following the crop harvests from state to state for five months. Today the children start back to school.

Today is my first day as a primary teacher. I know from my one year of experience teaching Junior High that "control" is the most important thing. I asked for this grade three assignment because my year teaching Junior High has convinced me that it would be so much easier if only they were smaller. I am waiting in my room for the morning bell to ring. In preparation I have decorated the room as I imagine that a grade three class should look. Actually it looks just like my classroom when I was in grade three: desks all in rows, the letters of the alphabet displayed across the top of the chalkboards, bulletin boards featuring autumn themes, a giant September calendar page, and a big picture clock with movable hands. On each desk, in order to limit the commotion of children finding desks, I have placed a sheet of

paper with a child's first name in big colorful print. All is ready.

My mouth feels dry and I am a little nauseous. I tell myself, "Relax, they are children, third graders; you are the teacher; you are in control!" The bell rings and I jump, surprised, even though I have been nervously watching the clock for the last half hour. Here they come!

Children begin filling the room: filling it with bodies, smells, and, most of all, sounds. My anxiety builds with the noise level. Some goats have come in with the children and are eating the papers with the children's names off the desks. The children laugh and yell and some with shepherding skills begin chasing the goats out. The 40 desks become occupied and I realize there are not enough desks. The noise and confusion continues to increase. I realize it is way too loud. I yell, "Sit down and be quiet, please." Some of them comply but many do not. I am not even sure they have heard me. My anxiety is increasing and I am worried that the principal may come to investigate the noise.

A little boy is tugging at my arm and speaking to me in Spanish. I don't understand him and I ask him to speak more slowly. A little girl wearing a bright yellow taffeta dress is sitting at her desk with her arm raised. She says she has to go to the "escusado" (washroom). I tell her she will have to wait until the class settles down. The little boy is speaking to me again and I now understand that he is worried because he has no desk. Three other children are yelling that they have no desks either. I tell them to sit at the art table in the back of the room. Other children begin yelling that they want to sit at the art table too. The art table has become a scene of chaos.

I lose it. "¡Calla te! (Shut up!)," I scream. The effect is dramatic. The room falls silent. I like it. It feels good. I am the teacher; I am in control.

Then, in the silence, I hear a gentle sobbing. I turn and see a beautiful little girl sitting with her arm still raised. The sound of her crying is mixing with the sound of running water. Urine is flowing

out around her bright yellow "first day of school" dress and cascading to the floor.

I am the teacher, I am in control.

On Top of the World

It has been nearly a year since leaving the village of Ambler, Alaska. I miss it very much so I was naturally excited when I received a letter with the Ambler postmark a few days ago. It was good news: a note from the Densloes, the couple that ran the air taxi service in Ambler. They wrote that they would be flying into Anchorage with four Ambler youths who would be beginning residential school this month. They wanted to know if I would meet them at the airport and perhaps help the young people get settled by giving them a tour of the city and taking them out to eat, before delivering them to the residential high school.

I fired back an honest reply that I would be looking forward to seeing them and that I was excited at the prospect of showing them the "sites" of the "big city." I imagined that it would be great fun as these two boys and two girls had never been away from

home before. They had never seen automobiles, television or buildings taller than one story high, or eaten in a restaurant! What an adventure they will have!

So here I am today watching anxiously as the Densloe's plane taxis to the terminal. I can see the boys' and girls' faces pressed to the windows of the plane as the Cessna 185 pulls up among the MUCH LARGER airplanes parked by the terminal. I rush out to greet them and help them unload.

After a lot of hugging and a lot of hauling we are all in my van and headed toward downtown Anchorage. Leaving the airport we pass Steen Lake, the largest concentration of float planes in the world. I stop at Earthquake Park where a peat fire still smolders underground from the 1965 earthquake. They are amazed to see smoke rising from the ground they are walking on with no sight of anything burning. In fact, they are amazed at everything: the cars and trucks on the highway, all the people (Ambler's population is only 160), the big buildings, the signs, telephone poles, and "ALL the PEOPLE!" We go on to the docks to see the huge freighters unloading

cargo containers. Every time I round a new corner they exclaim, "Ho-ly!"

As the Densloes and I had pre-arranged, we saved the best for last. We decided to splurge and treat the boys and girls to a fancy dinner at the Anchorage Westward Hotel. It is Anchorage's tallest building at 26 stories; the restaurant is on the top floor with fantastic 360 degree views of the city, Cook Inlet, and the Chugach mountains. I can't wait to see how big their eyes will be when we get to the top.

After a good deal of time gawking at the building from the outside, we walk into the hotel and head for an elevator. I had grossly underestimated how big a deal a first elevator ride might be. When the elevator lurches upward the kids all scream in Inuktitut, "Anaa!" At the top the stop is just as exciting. We exit the elevator and walk into the restaurant.

The Ambler youths are dressed in their northern best: new jeans, new western shirts and belts with beadwork. They are so excited to be in this big new world. The waitress seats us in the dining room next to the windows and tells us there is an outside

observation deck as well. The boys and girls can't wait to see it so I go with them to find the observation deck. We have to go through the lounge to get to there and it is very crowded. All the bars in Anchorage are crowded with oil field workers, as the North Slope pipeline construction is in full swing and exploration is booming.

As we pass close to the bar four big men in coveralls and cowboy hats turn and watch us go by. Behind us, as we are stepping out onto the deck, I hear a loud Texas accent, "God damn, they'll let just anybody in here!" My face burns with rage and I look quickly to see if the boys and girls have heard the racist remark. At first, I am relieved to see that they were already streaking to look over the railing and were out of earshot. Then I realize that this is just their first day in Anchorage. They will have countless other opportunities to be subjected to this kind of verbal, and probably physical, abuse in their three years of high school.

Welcome to civilization.

Esperanza in a White Dress

Paradise! Kim and I are sitting by the pool at Los Pelicanos Resort looking out at the beach and the Bahia de California. We are trying desperately to soak up enough heat to last us through the upcoming Alberta winter. The warm ocean breeze and the ice cold Margaritas make it easy to set aside, for a little while, the busy lives which await us back in Edmonton. We are especially "carefree" because Kim won this trip in a "scratch and win" promotion when she recently changed banks.

There is a great deal of activity in our view with people swimming, para-sailing, water skiing, sunning, and countless beach venders selling hammocks, t-shirts, silver jewelry, blankets, and many other items. By sitting back from the public beach on the hotel pool deck, we have insulated ourselves from the venders; they are not allowed to bother the hotel guests. We are content to take an occasional dip in the pool and while away the afternoon reading and sunning.

As the afternoon nears evening we move over to the stone sea wall at the edge of the beach. We are

sitting on the wall watching the sun's progress toward the sea when a young girl in a white cotton dress walks casually up and sits beside us on the stone wall. She is about eleven or twelve years old, very slim and brown, with the fine features of her Spanish ancestors. We are eating from a can of pepitas, salted pumpkin seeds, and we offer her some. She asks if we are Americans and when we reply that we are from Canada she replies knowingly, "Ah, Canada." Her English is limited so I speak to her in Spanish. She continues to respond in broken English, perhaps, like me, to gain the practice.

She asks our names and tells us hers is Esperanza. She seems content to sit with us eating pepitas for quite some time. I am somewhat surprised at such self-confident poise in one so young. After a while longer Esperanza looks up at me and points first at herself and then at me, and then makes the universal sign for sleep by putting her palms together, prayer-like, and inclining her head, resting her cheek on her hands with her eyes closed.

I am struck speechless in two languages.

Story, Presence, and Representation

What is there about story? We all have experienced its power: when we burst into tears in a public theater, laugh out-loud while reading in a quiet room, lose all track of time reading a book that we "can't put down." The story causes us to lose control, to become separated from our self-consciousness, to step out of time. We step not to a place where we turn the words of our thought onto what was, but to the place before time, before the subject/object: the place where the world is born. This is not the place where we create the world with our words, but the place where the world springs itself upon us and catches us without the words to make it already historical. And this is not a place of thoughtful action, it is a place where our only action is reaction, reaction to a world which asserts its presence upon us, where presence is all there is.

Is it possible then for the words of a narrative to represent the experiences and the reality of others? There was a time when I felt that the evidence of our bodies (the tears, the laughter, the pain, the joy) gave proof that such a representation

occurred. One of the fundamental, even magical, powers of story is the power to "call to presence." In a way story allows us to "experience without experiencing." This experiential aspect of story is testified to by our bodies: the tears we shed while viewing a sad (or, indeed, happy) scene in a film, our accelerated heart rate while reading an exciting or suspense filled passage in a novel, and the various other story induced physiological responses, ranging from humorous to terrifying to erotic. However, is this proof, or even evidence, of "representation"?

For the past four years I have told the story of Aida, which opened this section, to the student teachers in my university classes. I do this in the hope that they will learn from my experience. In a very real sense, I am obligated to do so by the "face" of the little girl named Aida. In any event, I have now told this story to nearly a thousand student teachers. Two months ago I ran into one of these (now former) student teachers. He had sought me out in order to tell me something that had happened to him early in his first teaching experience. He said that during a very chaotic morning lesson a child had

raised his hand and asked to go to the washroom. His first reaction was to tell the child he would have to wait, but before he finished the sentence he "thought of the little girl in the yellow dress." He reversed his position and told the boy to go ahead to the washroom. Is it the "representational" of story which allowed this to happen?

There is a lively discussion in progress regarding representation in literary, educational, anthropological, historical, and sociological critical discourses (among others). Because of my own identity as "teacher," my involvement in teacher education, and my ongoing inquiry into issues pertaining to culture and language, I have found much of this discussion helpful to me as I strive to find my way in a poststructural, postmodern, postcolonial landscape.

(A parenthetical interruption: While writing the last sentence I was struck by the image of a landscape of "posts." Three years ago while traveling in Australia, I visited an aboriginal cultural center. In this center there was a room filled with vertically placed heavy timber posts. It had the feel of closely

spaced trees of different diameters, randomly located as in a natural forest. On these posts were nailed "texts," in the manner of the flyers stapled to telephone poles on urban streets. The "texts" were historical, dating from the days of the early colonization of Australia, "posted colonial texts". One of these texts haunts me; it resurfaces-interrupts-erupts whenever I encounter the word "colonial." It was/is a reproduction of an article in a London newspaper advising those who would venture to Australia seeking land and fortune. The author stated that the best way to acquire land was to travel into the bush beyond the area already occupied by colonists. There one could find huge expanses of land waiting to be claimed. The article went on to caution that the new settlers must be prepared to "harden" their conscience as they would be required to kill substantial numbers of "bushmen" inhabiting the land. The author insisted that this was necessary and should not trouble new settlers too much, as it had been well documented in the latest scientific studies that these bushmen were not actually human, but in fact a sub-human species of animal related to the ape.

Therefore, this killing should be viewed much as the extermination of rats or starlings which infest grain bins and fields.)

Some Disruptive Voices

Deborah Britzman, Johannes Fabian, and Gabriele Schwab are among those whose compelling and provocative discussions have helped me not so much to navigate, as to begin to search for a place to stand on this shifting quaking terrain, this *terra non firma*. They do so by first knocking me off balance, by divesting me of the security of my stories as representations of experience:

> This returns us to the clashing investments in how stories are told and of the impossibility of telling everything. There is that excess, that difference within the story, informing how the story is told, the imperatives produced within its tellings, and the subject positions made possible and impossible there. These signifying "spaces" must be admitted as central to the structure and regulation of ethnographic work if readers are to participate in exceeding and

informing the meanings ethnography might offer. The reason we might do ethnography, then, is to think the unthought in more complex ways, to trouble confidence in being able to "observe" behavior, "apply the correct technique," and "correct" what is taken as a mistake. Ethnographic narratives should trace how power circulates and surprises, theorize how subjects spring from the discourses that incite them, and question the belief in representation even as one must practice representation as a way to intervene critically in the constitutive constraints of discourses.
(Britzman, 1995, p. 236)

Writing as re-presentation simply cannot be the fundamental issue. Presence is, because before there is representation there must be presence; and in the end the question of ethnographic objectivity still comes down to the question of what makes it possible to have access to another culture, or to be in the presence of another culture--both of which seem to be required if

ethnographic knowledge is to be more than projection or delusion. (Fabian, 1994, p. 92)

For example, if (when) literary texts become highly experimental, challenging linear and monolingual narratives and generating a variety of new forms of poetic language and aesthetic practices, their changing literary forms affect everything from the cultural production of subjectivity and familiar practices of reading to the politics of aesthetic forms and theories of language.

In this context, it is no coincidence that literary texts have become increasingly sensitive to their different environments. Less concerned with a mere representation of referential worlds, they have become more and more interventionist, reflecting social concerns, philosophical and epistemological premises of their time, other discursive and esthetic practices, the dramatic impact of technology and the media on our way of life, and the increasing globalization of our culture. (Schwab, 1994, p. ix-x)

The Ongoing Struggle

Having lost my balance I am struggling to regain it. As part of that struggle I return once again to my body and my personal experience of story. A couple of months ago I watched (on video) a movie titled "My Life," starring Michael Keaton. The story is about a "thirty something" year old man who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. His wife was pregnant with their first child and the doctors told him he would not live to see the birth. In order to leave something of himself for his unborn son he set about making a "home video" about his life. The video within the video narrated both the story of his living and of his dying.

The personally shocking thing about my experience of this story was not that I cried, for I am sure that many, if not most, people who have seen this film experienced tear filled eyes. No, the shocking thing was that I sobbed uncontrollably and inconsolably; I completely broke down in grief in a way no other movie (or story in any form) has ever caused me to do. This was not a mystery to me because I knew where the grief originated; I knew that I was not crying for Michael

Keaton or the fictional character he was attempting to represent. My grief was real and I was powerless to control it.

Four years ago I shared presence nearly everyday for nine months with a close friend as he went through the day by day process of dying, and trying so very hard not to die, from the effects of, and the radiation treatment for, an inoperable brain tumor. And although that is "another story" which happened "once upon a time" I believe that the relationship between these stories is not simply that the fiction caused the experience of my grief to be remembered. Nor do I believe that a representation of experience in the movie evoked the re-experience of my past grief.

In a literal sense, space and time render representation a myth, or even an oxymoron. If indeed story can bring a presence to us, it is always a new presence and never a re-presence, always a new presentation and never a re-presentation, always our own presence and never the presence of an other.

What IS at work/play when story weaves its magic? Story does not have the power to deliver to us the

presence of the other. Rather, it may call us to our *own* presence and, most importantly, orient our presence toward the possibilities inherent in the living (even when dying) presence of an other. For a teacher in a room full of children, and in a world where living WITH each other may be our only hope for survival, this continuing orientation may be crucial.

Return to Jaws

To whom do I turn to help me find a place to stand? Reluctantly, I find myself turning/re-turning to Heidegger. This is the person I once referred to, in my master's thesis (Calhoon, 1989), as "Jaws" because of his voracious logic and the manner in which he takes our legs from under us and pulls us into the abyss. I am reluctant in the sense that I have not previously been able to give Heidegger a sympathetic reading. Now, I find Heidegger's indeterminacy of language my only refuge.

Martin Heidegger refers to the power of language to both "call" us to speak and call "to" us from silence, not by giving us the "correct" word but by enabling us to "hear" that which is unspeakable. Jane Kelly Rodeheffer explicates:

> In the essay "Language," he (Heidegger) suggests that the voice of language--it's speaking-- is not an uttering, but stillness. The stillness at the heart of language calls to mortals through the poem, which is the only form of speaking in which primal calling is any longer to be heard. (Rodeheffer, 1990, p. 133)

Heidegger views the poet as the only "authentic" speaker, with the poem being not the poet's words but that to which those words "call" and that which "calls" the poet to speak, "...the experience of the lack of a word for Being is the experience at the heart of poetic saying, which allows what must remain unsaid to withdraw even as it comes to expression"(Rodeheffer, 1990, p. 134).

Heidegger, in his essay *Poetry, Language and Thought*, states:

> Projective saying is poetry: the saying of the world and earth, the saying of the arena of their strife and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods. Poetry is the saying of the unconcealdness of beings. Actual language at any given moment is the happening of this

> saying, in which a people's world historically arises for it and the earth is preserved as that which remains closed. Projective saying is saying which, in preparing the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into a world. (Heidegger in Krell, 1977, p. 185)

From this perspective my stories become not the words themselves but the presence to which those words call. My "authenticity" as a speaker/writer can only be measured by the degree to which the "presence" alluded to by my story can call forth a re-orientation of presence in the reader/listener.

Relating Relationships

In this inquiry I explore how story (like experience but different from experience) might impact on our prejudices, intuitions, and embodied assumptions. Not to destroy them, for as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1986) points out in his discussion of "the prejudice against prejudice" time does not permit us to live without them, but to constantly re-orient our presence in relationship to the presence of others.

The word "relationship" is a powerful example of just how big one word can be. When I looked it up,

along with its roots and derivations, I was astounded to discover how much it "speaks" to the questions which drive this inquiry:

> **relate** **1** to tell, recite, narrate; **2** to connect; establish a relation between; **3** to interact with others in a sympathetic relationship
>
> **relation** **1** act of narrating; **2** narrative; **3** state of being mutually or reciprocally connected; **4** kind of connection, correspondence, or feeling existing between two or more persons or things
>
> **relationship** **1** kinship; **2** connection or involvement
>
> **relative** **1** comparative, not absolute; **2** having meaning only in connection with something else
>
> (The Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary, 1985)

I find it intriguing to consider how the connectedness expressed in the definitions of the word "relationship" has such a postmodern feel to it. But even more intriguing is the prospect that this may be the same connectedness which is so much at the heart of the "pre-modern" world views of many Aboriginal and

Eastern cultures. For the last four years I have been telling student teachers that stories of teaching are stories about relationships, never realizing until now just how much that statement implies.

Taking a Stand

So if asked, "Where do you stand now?," shall I answer: In the presence of (or in relation to) a little girl named Aida wearing a bright yellow dress and a dying friend, OR in the historicality of a world created by language? I guess I would have to be like Forest Gump and say, "both."

Chapter Three

The Call to Teach

There are many approaches to helping others learn to work with young children. We have tried to give you guidance to discover who you are and what you value for children rather than teaching you content and skills in isolation. Like creating a clay figure in which each part is drawn out of a central core, we strive to help your work to be an integral part of who you are. Without this base in values, you may not know how to respond when faced with a group of real children, and like a poorly constructed clay figurine formed by sticking head, arms, and legs onto a ball, you may "fall to pieces" when exposed to the heat of the fire. (Feeney, Christensen & Moravcik, 1995, pp. vi-vii)

The Real Teacher

Man or Myth?

Well, today's the day. I finally get to meet the "legendary" Mr. Richards. It is pure chance that I have been assigned to his class as there are three other grade eight math teachers. Three years ago my sister had Mr. Richards for grade eight math. All I heard from her for the whole school year was how WONDERFUL Mr. Richards was. This from a girl who hates math! My sister is three years older than I am, but sometimes she is such a sucker. She was convinced that Mr. Richards really liked her and thought of her as special. I remember the day she came home from school all excited and puffed up because Mr. Richards had made a big fuss about how beautiful her new dress was, and now he was her "favorite teacher in the whole world!" Give me a break! Like that wasn't just your standard teacher baloney, "What a pretty dress you're wearing, Jane Ann." Baloney, yes, but it sure worked on Jane Ann. She was always studying her math, doing her math homework, and practicing for her math tests. It's a wonder she didn't flunk all her other classes. And Mr. Richards could do no wrong. Every day it

was, "Mr. Richards this," and "Mr. Richards that." I haven't even met the phony and I'm already sick of him!

So now here I am three years later heading into his class. He is standing at the door shaking everyone's hand as we enter. How corny! I find a nice desk at the back of the room. The bell rings and Mr. Richards begins to call roll from the class list. He calls my name and I answer, "Here." He says, "Calhoon, Calhoon... Do you have a sister named Jane Ann?" Okay, okay, so he can remember names. I answer, "Yes."

"You know, one day your sister wore the most beautiful dress."

<u>The World's Largest Math Problem</u>

That was just the first time of many that Mr. Richards would amaze me. One day when we walked into class we were confronted by the world's biggest math problem. In those days the walls in math classrooms were all chalkboards. This was necessary so that all the students could work at the board at the same time in order to determine who could work the problems the fastest. On this particular day all of the

chalkboards (three entire walls of them!) were completely filled with numbers. Upon closer examination it became apparent that the numbers were in the form of one humongous multiplication problem. It began at the top of the chalkboard at the front of the room and proceeded line by line: 3,463,968 x 7,529,408 x 1, 528, 645 x 9,725,418 x 377,850 x etc., etc., etc. It continued from the bottom of that chalkboard onto the one on the next wall and then onto the chalkboard at the back of the room. There were literally thousands of numbers.

Near the bottom of the back chalkboard the problem suddenly ended, or I should say paused, with a times sign with no number after it. After he let us crane our necks for a while, building up a strong curiosity, Mr. Richards asked for a student volunteer. He then told us that he would turn his back while the student wrote three more elements into the giant multiplication problem, making a point to instruct the student to make the problem as difficult as possible. After that he said that he would turn around and solve the entire problem in five seconds! We all laughed, "Impossible!," "No way!"

As the student wrote the additional numbers into the problem we called out for him to write bigger numbers, billions, trillions even. Finally the moment of truth came. Mr. Richards turned quickly to the chalkboard and wrote the number "0" after the equal sign. "Zero?!," we screamed, "that can't be right!" The answer to the world's biggest math problem couldn't possibly be zero! After allowing us to rant for a little while more Mr. Richards walked over to the side chalkboard and pointed to a place in the middle of the problem where it was written, "...5,824,406 x 0 x 2,678,978...." He asked us what any number multiplied by zero equaled. Some of us reluctantly admitted it was zero. He next asked us what zero multiplied by any number equaled. By then we knew we had "been had;" as impossible as it seemed, the answer to the world's largest math problem was indeed "zero."

<u>The Elegant Solution</u>

It was almost impossible to feel bad about yourself in Mr. Richard's class. One reason for this was that all of us were motivated to do better than we had ever done before. Students who had dreaded math

throughout their schooling experienced complete turn-arounds in Mr. Richards' class.

Another reason was that Mr. Richards always emphasized the positive. When he passed back tests he complimented each student on some aspect of his or her performance. Even the student with the lowest mark would hear, "Bobby, I was particularly impressed with your solution to problem number seven; it was very elegant indeed!" Even if that was the ONLY problem Bobby solved correctly, he couldn't help but feel proud of himself.

The Test of Time

Many years later my sister was living in Washington, D.C. She worked downtown in an office close to the capital building. One lunch hour as she was walking back to work she heard a voice call, "Jane Ann, Jane Ann Calhoon?" She turned to see an old man she did not immediately recognize. But when he took her hand and told her how wonderful it was to see her the years melted away. She was the young girl in the beautiful new dress with her "favorite teacher in the whole world."

The Impostor

The village of La Grulla, Texas, sits on the north bank of the Rio Grande River. On the south bank lies the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico. The population of La Grulla is almost 100% Hispanic (Mexican American and Mexican). The people are migrant farm workers from both sides of the border. The first language of La Grulla is Spanish.

It is Monday morning and the temperature is hot. It is a heat that comes up from the ground as well as down from the sun. I am walking from the parking lot of Grulla Elementary toward Grulla Junior High. It is the first day of my first teaching assignment. I don't feel like a teacher. I feel like I am dreaming.

A group of young men, drinking beer and working on a car, note my passing and yell, "¿Que tal, hombre? ¿Que paso, primo?! ¿Quieras cervesa? (What's happening, man? What's going on, cousin? Want a beer?)." They laugh loudly. I am at a complete loss for an appropriate response. I feel like the word "gringo" is tattooed on my forehead. I smile self consciously, wave, and keep on walking.

The school is a two story yellow brick box sitting in a field made bare by a lack of rain and a herd of goats. It has twelve foot ceilings and wooden floors made dark by fifty years of sweeping with oiled sawdust. The principal greets me and tells me my room number. He says, "Good luck, you're going to need it!"

I walk to my room and wait nervously for the bell to ring. I feel like I don't belong here; like I'm not a teacher, but only pretending to be a teacher. When the bell rings my heart begins to pound. I try to look calm and confident as the room begins to fill with eighth graders. Many of them are bigger than I am, and some appear to be almost my age. The conversation is in Spanish and I am catching little of it. I feel more than a touch of paranoia thinking that they are talking about me. They are loud and rowdy and cocky and totally consumed by puberty. The tension between the egos in this room, including my own, is palpable. I have no idea what I am about to say, but I think that if I can only speak, there may just be a chance that they won't eat me.

Today, I am supposed to be a teacher: a grade eight English Language Arts teacher to be precise. Actually, just Language Arts, "English" goes without saying; after all, this is America.

I am an impostor. I don't know "what in hell" I am doing, or what I am doing in hell for that matter. I have taken this job on an emergency certificate; I haven't even finished my degree. My only qualification to teach Language Arts is that I speak English. Unfortunately (for me), many of the young people in this room do not. Some of them have been on this side of the Rio Grande for only a few days. They are migrant farm workers and are in this room mostly because Texas law requires them to be.

I am right on the edge of panic; what will I do next? My lesson plan was prepared from the prescribed grade eight Language Arts text. Those of the young people in this class who have grown up in the United States have done so on the migrant circuit, attending six different schools each year as they follow the crops. Many of them cannot read. Others read at a grade two or three level. The freshly arrived Mexican students can read and write well, but not in English.

My lesson plan is useless. Things are getting out of hand as I try to think of something to do. The room is loud and chaotic so I tell them to get out their book. That's what teachers do, right? But now what? I am somewhat amazed to find myself writing on the blackboard (very teacher like), making a list of words selected at random from the first chapter. The class is quiet now as they watch me curiously. It is a long list as I am trying to think of something to do with it before I quit writing.

I hear myself telling them to get out their pencils and paper (where do I keep getting these great ideas?). "I want you all to look through the first chapter for the words I have written on the board. When you find a word, copy on your paper the entire sentence that the word is in. Keep working quietly until you have found all of the words."

They begin working and the room is dead silent. I see the principal walking by and he smiles approvingly as he peeks in. Some of the students work quickly and I am glad that I made a long list. They are all still writing when the bell rings. The noise of their leaving masks the sound of my long sigh.

Part of me is thinking, "Hey, that went pretty well!" Another part of me is trying desperately to think of even one worthwhile, educationally appropriate aspect of the mindless, pointless activity that had filled the last hour and a half. Perhaps to resolve this tension, I go to the staff bathroom and throw up.

Mikey and the Impostor

Behavior Management

In many teacher education programs of the early seventies, or at least the two in which I took my courses, behavior modification was "all the rage." I took a course called "Learning," based entirely on the work of B. F. Skinner, and another course which dealt with implementing Skinner's theory into classroom practice. I excelled in these courses and I embraced Skinnerian psychology almost as though it were my new religion. I was seduced by its comprehensiveness; it logically explained ALL human behavior. It became clear to me that simply through the skillful use of positive and negative reinforcement, I would be able to mold the behavior of my future students. Not only

could misbehavior be eliminated, but children could be coaxed to learn more through constant words of praise and pats on the back, augmented by M&M's as intermittent reinforcers. It was with this underlying theory and the techniques and strategies from my methods courses that I began my teaching life. So, you see, Mikey never really had a chance.

Macho Boy

Mikey Garcia was a "bad boy." He was very big for grade three: tall, wide and heavy. His size and his resulting strength formed the basis for much of his exterior personality. Mikey was "macho." In spite of this, Mikey was not really a bad boy; "bad boy" was only his image. However, image was very important to Mikey and he worked hard to maintain it. Unfortunately, for both of us, Mikey's image as "bad boy" and my image as "teacher" were in conflict.

For four months I had had a very organized behavior modification program going in my classroom. I was determined to emphasize positive reinforcement and had devised a system which seemed to be working very well. It was "simple but elegant." Each time the children did something good they received a mark

on a laminated sheet attached to their desk. I was generous with these marks, rewarding all kinds of positive behavior including finishing their work quickly, helping other students, "playing nice," keeping their desks clean, working quietly, answering correctly, helping clean the classroom, trying hard, improving grades and many others. I made it my mission to make sure that all of the children earned marks and built up their "mark accounts." I would move about the classroom with my special marker rewarding good behavior whenever I observed it.

Of course, for this to be an effective positive reinforcer the marks had to be worth something. At first I had a list of things they could buy with certain numbers of marks: 5 marks for a pencil, 10 marks for a candy bar, 10 marks for free time, etc. This, however, soon proved too expensive to operate in light of the large numbers of marks I was dispensing. Then came my true stroke of genius, the auction.

The Auction

I decided that every Friday afternoon we would have an auction where students could bid on a number of prizes. The prizes were a diverse collection of

desirable items consisting of farm chemical and seed company caps and jackets, ball point pens with advertising printed on them, unused wedding and birthday gifts that had been gathering dust in my attic, children's books, and a variety of school supplies. Between my own resources and all of the promotional items businesses gave me I was able to amass an impressive inventory of auction items.

As it turned out though, it was the auction itself which proved to be the biggest motivation. These were children who were used to working for money in the fields and had attended farm auctions with their parents, therefore very little instruction was necessary for them to become involved in the auction process. Auction fever ran so high that what the bid items were became almost irrelevant; winning the bidding battles became the major goal. During the week the children all worked hard and behaved very well in order to acquire marks in their accounts to spend at the Friday auction. I was very pleased with myself.

Getting Carried Away

As part of the migrant education program the children at Grulla Elementary were provided with a free hot lunch every day. Along with the lunch were cartons of milk, plain and chocolate. There was always a surplus of milk and, since the migrant children were in school until 5 PM, the principal decided to send that surplus to the classrooms for an afternoon milk break at 3 PM. This was great because by that time the children were always very thirsty from playing outside in the scorching heat during their afternoon recess.

One day, after passing out a carton of milk to each student, there were still about 20 cartons left in the case. At first I thought I would just offer another carton to any one who wanted one. Then I had a brilliant idea. I thought that this would be a good opportunity to reduce some of the children's mark accounts by auctioning off the extra milk. Often the bidding fever was so strong that they would pay exorbitant amounts for very modest items. If I could get them to spend their marks on the milk I could stretch my inventory of real prizes even further.

Some Negative Feedback

I held up the first carton of milk and as expected the bidding was lively. Mikey won the first carton with a bid of ten marks. He popped the carton open and drank the milk in one long drink punctuated with a big "ahhhh!" The next milk again drew active bidding and Mikey again was the winner with a bid of ten marks. And again he "chug-a-lugged" it, "aahhh!" After Mikey won and downed the third carton it was obvious that the children were becoming fascinated with Mikey's capacity for milk. To my disappointment they soon ceased to bid against him. They were determined to find out just how much milk Mikey could drink.

Without competitive bidders Mikey was acquiring the milk for one mark per carton. Each one he would drink elicited loud cheers from the class, and I have to admit that I too was becoming obsessed with finding out how much milk Mikey could drink. With each additional carton the cheering got louder and Mikey swelled with pride as well as milk. I will never forget the look on his face as I handed him the 12th carton. His confident smile looked incongruous with

his greenish pallor. Five seconds later Mikey gave new meaning to the term "projectile vomit." Appropriately enough, I was the one in the line of fire.

Mikey Teaches Me Another Lesson

The strap was the rule of law at Grulla Elementary in 1972. This had been the case for time immemorial and the students knew and expected that breaking rules inevitably lead to a paddling. The way they determined where the boundaries were was by pushing a new teacher until they were paddled. Since I did not have the heart, or mind, for corporal punishment I relied on my reward system for my classroom management. Even though I was not a fan of negative reinforcement, early in the year I occasionally had to "fine" a child by taking away marks from an account. And yes, Mikey was often the child being fined.

About three months into the year it became necessary for me to miss two days of school in order to attend to some personal business. The principal informed me that due to a shortage of substitute teachers a young inexperienced teacher aide would be

taking my class. He asked me to "put the fear of God" into my students to behave themselves while I was gone. In order to do this, I told them that if anyone misbehaved badly while I was away I would be paddling that person on my return. Mikey rose to the challenge.

When I returned I learned that Mikey had been bad. And when he was bad he was very, very bad. So there I was; I was stuck. In my "new teacher" mind I had no choice but to paddle Mikey. It was very quiet when I walked into the classroom. The children were nervously waiting to see what was going to happen. Mikey was trying desperately to look elaborately casual. I announced that the principal had informed me of Mikey's crime and that now he would have to be punished. I was holding the principal's paddle in my hand. Mikey's facade was beginning to crack. I felt locked on a track heading in a direction I did not want to go, and I could do nothing to change directions.

So as not to embarrass Mikey in front of his friends I told him to come with me out of the room. At least I told myself that it was Mikey's

embarrassment I was trying to prevent. We walked nervously to the main building. To insure privacy I took Mikey to the supply room. Once we were out of earshot of the class Mikey began apologizing for his misbehavior, promising not to do it again. To no avail though, because even before Barbara Colorosa we knew the golden rule: Say what you mean, mean what you say and, above all, do what you say you are going to do.

Being new to this experience I wasn't sure how to go about it. I had been on the other end of the paddle and had the general idea, but I had no idea how hard to swing it. Reasoning that because Mikey was so large I would have to swing pretty hard, I told Mikey to bend over. My determination to give him a good whack was to ensure that he would not return to the classroom laughing and telling the other children that it didn't hurt. So with Mikey maintaining his stoic demeanor as he bent over I wound up and swung the paddle.

The first shock was the sound, as loud as a gun shot; the second shock was worse. Mikey exploded into tears and I instantly knew I had made a big mistake.

I never dreamt that a boy as tough as Mikey could cry that hard. I put my arm around his shoulders and now it was my turn to apologize. Tears were coming from my own eyes as I told him that I was sorry I had hurt him. I had a fleeting moment of anxiety thinking about the principal opening the supply room door and finding a teacher and a child in there crying. I knew at that moment, beyond any shadow of doubt, that I had just given my last paddling. We talked for a while trying to make sense of what had just happened. Finally we agreed to keep it "our little secret."

Teacher as "Who" not "What"

Even though it has been more than twenty-five years, I still remember how good I felt the first time a child called me "teacher." At first I felt remiss for not insisting that I be addressed only as Mr. Calhoon; in university I had learned that teachers must demand respect. But when a child called me "teacher," as though that were my name, it made me feel for the first time that I really was a teacher.

The quotation which opened this section (Feeney et al, 1995) comes from Who Am I in the Lives of

Children?, one of the most popular early childhood education textbooks in use today. I believe that this distinction between teacher as "who" and teacher as "what" is crucial. It underlies many of what I feel are the most exciting and hopeful trends in teaching and teacher education today (i.e. reflective practice, collaboration, action research, and narrative methodologies). Indeed, the reflective model of teacher education we are currently practicing in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta is designed to assist student teachers in forming their identities as teachers through self-reflection.

Reflection

There, I said it: the "r" word, a word which is in high vogue in teacher education programs and teacher professional development literature across North America. On the surface it seems like a perfectly harmless little word. It's easy to spell and pronounce. Its most common usage, meaning "careful thought," doesn't seem all that menacing. So why is it that this word, when spoken aloud to fourth

year education students, elicits choruses of moans and groans and much gnashing of teeth?

The word "reflection" functions as both the process and the product of that process. Thus, the act of reflection may result in an interesting (or disturbing, amusing, heart breaking, infuriating, etc.) reflection. So here we are, in that "process verses product" controversy again! Is it possible that what student teachers find problematic about "reflection" is not the process but the production of a satisfactory product of reflection? In many cases we actually grade or evaluate these products. Now there is a challenge that might cause stress in any of us: "How do I produce a 'reflection' which will earn me a high mark for this assignment or course?"

If we are to remain faithful to the idea that the process is more important than the product, the problem then becomes, "How do we elicit (or perhaps evoke) reflection/reflecting in student teachers?" Is there something which might call us to reflect in a spontaneous, perhaps even irresistible, way? I would like to explore the idea that this "irresistible

something" might be that which called many of us to teach in the first place: the face of the child.

The Face of the Child

Emmanuel Levinas, in his critique of Husserl, uses the word "face" to denote the presence of the other. Levinas feels that, while it is possible to examine phenomenologically most of what we perceive as our world, and to do this with a satisfactory degree of success if our methodology is rigorous, it is impossible to successfully apply this methodology to the face of the other. The face of the other cannot be observed objectively and described phenomenologically along the tenets of Husserl. The face of the other eludes our description by its sheer magnitude, its constant state of flux, and its powerful effects on the observer. The face, in fact, makes certain ethical demands on us by its presence. It demands both our attention and our care (Cohen, 1989).

If we can accept being present with children as the central experience of teaching, then a look at the nature of that presence seems in order. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schutz, in their different

perspectives, each describes the incredibly and unique richness of the experience of being in the presence of another human being. Schutz (1970) explains:

> All these different encounters...are encounters with a human being as such, with this particular human being, and with this particular human being at this particular moment of time. And these meaning-contexts of mine will be "subjective" to the extent that I am attending to your actual conscious experiences themselves and not merely to my own lived experiences of you....
> Furthermore, as I watch you, I shall see that you are oriented to me, that you are seeking the subjective meaning of my words....I will in turn take account of the fact that you are thus oriented to me, and this will influence both my intentions with respect to you and how I act toward you. This again you will see, I will see that you have seen it, and so on. This interlocking of glances, this thousand-faceted mirroring of each other, is one of the unique features of the face-to-face situation. (p. 186)

Merleau-Ponty, in The Primacy of Perception, also speaks to the reality shaping characteristics of this experience:

> It is thus necessary that, in the perception of another, I find myself in relation with another "myself," who is, in principle, open to the same truths as I am, in relation to the same being that I am. And this perception is realized. From the depths of my subjectivity I see another subjectivity invested with equal rights appear, because the behavior of the other takes place within my perceptual field. I understand this behavior, the words of another; I espouse his thought because the other, born in the midst of my phenomena, appropriated them and treats them in accord with typical behaviors which I myself have experienced. Just as my body, as the system of all my holds on the world, founds the unity of the objects which I perceive, in the same way the body of the other-as the bearer of symbolic behaviors and of the behavior of true reality-tears itself away from being one of my phenomena, offers me the task of a true communication, and

> confers on my objects the new dimension of inter subjective being or, in other words, of objectivity. (1964, pp. 17-18)

Richard Cohen (1989), in examining the work of Levinas on what it means to be present with an "other," makes two statements which strike right to the heart of our experience as teachers. He summarizes Levinas's position:

> All meanings are already subject to the other person, are already for-the-other, and thus are subjected to a meaningfulness greater, of greater significance, of more importance- in the ethical sense-than any and all meanings constituted or fulfilled. (p. 42)
>
> The face of the other person is unique insofar as it makes claims on me that cannot be shirked without moral fault. The other person rivets the me to its place-irreplaceably beholden to the other, at the other's service. (p. 43)

John Caputo describes the "face" of the other as, "the most conspicuous point of access..., which opens the way to the recess, the 'ground' of the soul, its most hidden chambers" (1987, p. 44). Caputo lists as

one of the powers of the face the ability to dissemble, the face as a place where the truth is both unintentionally revealed and sometimes intentionally hidden (1987). I would suggest that the as yet underdeveloped ability of the young child to mask the face, in order to conceal feelings or "truth," makes that face even more vulnerable, and this vulnerability places ever stronger ethical demands on those of us who share our lives with children. The child looks at us with openness, and bares heart and soul with trust and love. A look of unconcealed pain or defiant anger can cut to our very souls. What an enormous responsibility that look places upon us!

By the "face of the child" in this inquiry I mean that "presence" which both sees and is seen, hears and is heard, listens and is listened to, touches and is touched, calls to us and is called by us; that presence which calls us to teach. It is a presence which is so big, so powerful, and so compelling that it must not be ignored. Levinas viewed the face of the other as an "infinity surpassing totality" (Caputo, 1993, p. 18). Indeed, to look into the face of the child is like looking into the face of

infinity: infinite possibilities, infinite desire, infinite joy, infinite pain, infinite responsibility, and infinite hopefulness.

Anthropologist John Farella (1993) speaks to this power of the face of the child in The Wind in a Jar:

> Two-year-olds are so much more real than infants....Somewhere between two and four may be as real as we get. They are completely hope and potentiality. They can move on their own and get into things and every day they learn and display new things, new words, new looks that make them seem more and more human and very distinct, strongly expressing their personalities. (p. 113)

As an early childhood educator, this description resonates strongly with my experiences in Head Start and my work in day care settings.

Ethics and/or Obligation

In his book Against Ethics (1993), John Caputo raises issues which I believe have unique implications for those of us who choose to live as teachers. He explicates Levinas's position on obligation, "Obligation is a spontaneous causality, a cause without antecedent that breaks in upon the unbroken

regularity of phenomenal succession, with a power to move heaven and earth" (p. 13), and supports it with, "One is always, necessarily, structurally, on the receiving end of a command, dominated by its transcendence, blinded by its power" (p. 14).

However, Caputo resists Levinas's enshrinement of this obligation in ethics. He does not view obligation as a more originary ethics. It is in this resistance, which he describes as his "impiety," that I believe Caputo points to the place where teachers live:

> Obligation happens. It is a fact, as it were, but is not a necessary truth. Obligation calls, but its call is finite, a strictly earthbound communication, transpiring here below, not in transcendental space.
>
> Obligation calls, and it calls for justice, but the caller in the call is not identifiable, decidable. I cannot make it out. I cannot say that the call is the Voice of God, or of Pure Practical Reason, or of a Social Contract "we" have all signed, or a trace of the Form of the Good stirring in our souls, or the trace of the

> Most High. I do not deny that these very beautiful hypotheses of ethics would make obligation safe, but my impiety is that I do not believe that obligation is safe. (1993, p. 15)

"Obligation happens;" now there is a bumper sticker for a teacher! Could this "call" of obligation be the call of teaching? The tensions in which teachers live today may relate more to Caputo's "unsafe" obligation than to the safety of ethics.

Tough Choices

So, how does the teacher end up in this place of tension? I believe we choose this place. In Caputo's (1993) challenge of Levinas's notion of an obligation to the other rooted in the other's "infinity," he opens a space where the teacher must choose a place to stand. He states:

> The Other who claims us "ethically" (in obligation) is not an infinity surpassing totality but a part that defies the totality, that resists totalization, that asserts itself, hyperbolically, in the face of a faceless cosmos. The Other is not infinity but a *partiality to which we are unapologetically partial* ....The

> "ethical" for me, if we are to keep this word in virtue of a double writing, which for me would amount to nothing more than retaining the classical way to name obligation, does not name the "metaphysical" but the hyperbolical. It names an act of *hyperbolic partiality and defiance*.
>
> (my italics)(1993, p. 19)

For the teacher, the "face of the child" is the other to whom we MUST choose to be "unappologeticaly partial" and it is in the tensions of this choice that teaching becomes an "act of hyperbolic partiality and defiance" (italics in above quotation).

In today's discourse of accountability, teachers find themselves in a very confusing, often paradoxical, situation. To whom must we be accountable? We must be accountable to the state because we are, after all, employees/agents of the state. It is also reasonable to assume that we must be accountable to the parents whose children we teach; the law, *in locus parentis*, certainly supports this responsibility. Our society's support for the "rights" of children (which will be explored further

in following section), reinforces a notion of the fundamental accountability of teachers to their students. And finally, as moral agents with free wills, we are in some sense ultimately accountable to ourselves.

In this complex situation the rights and duties of all those involved (teachers, parents, governments) inevitably come into conflict and as teachers we must constantly negotiate these conflicts. These negotiations require teachers to make difficult choices in relation to these conflicting rights and duties.

Children First

In education, especially since Dewey and Rousseau, our discourse has been filled with rhetoric which places the needs of the child as our first priority. The language of "child centered" education ("empowering" children, "nurturing environments," "caring" teachers, individualizing curriculum, inclusive education, democratic classrooms, etc.) supports the assumption that the needs of the child must always be our central consideration. However, since the determination of what those needs are is

such a subjective process, this discourse does little to help teachers in their everyday lives with children. Caught between the demands of the principal, the parents' expectations, the requirements of the curriculum, their professional obligations, and their finite personal resources of time and energy, the resultant stress takes a heavy toll.

In this increasingly complex educational environment, the needs of the child can become just one more consideration among many, one factor to be balanced and weighed with all the rest. This is potentially tragic because it can blind us to what I believe is our absolutely fundamental obligation as people who stand as "teacher" in the presence of the "face of the child."

The "face of the child" which calls us to teach makes certain ethical/obligational demands of us. It calls on us to "do the right thing," the appropriate thing. Our ignorance makes it difficult, if not impossible, to know what the "right thing" is. We are driven by this ignorance to deepen our relationship with the child in order to increase our understanding. In addition, the vulnerability inherent in the face of

the child also calls on us "not to do the wrong thing." As "teacher" I live in this space between my longing to do the right thing and my fear of doing the wrong thing. And it can never be a comfortable place, for as my relationship with the child deepens, and the potential for doing the right thing increases, so increases the potential for doing the wrong thing. The stronger the bond (love, friendship, caring),the more the child trusts the teacher to do the right thing, the greater the hurt when that trust is broken.

In order to do the right thing we must act. We must select something to do and do it. We cannot allow the fear of doing the wrong thing to paralyze us into doing nothing. This would, in fact, be "doing the wrong thing." This is a circular trap which teachers must avoid.

As teachers we walk this line which requires us to select what we believe is the right thing to do and DO IT. However, having selected and acted, we must always leave open the question of the "rightness" of that action. To allow our arrogance to close that question would condemn us to the possibility, or inevitability, of doing the same "wrong thing" over

and over again. I would not like to consider the prospect of repeating any of the errors of ignorance and arrogance from my early teaching recounted above. In fact, the face of a child named Aida, wearing a bright yellow dress, demands that I not.

Chapter Four

Stolen Ground

I, as one of the "native" people, have been studied under qualitative and quantitative research techniques, I have sat in university lecture halls and in small community halls and listened and lived with the results of some of this research. Sometimes I knew I was an object of study; most of the time I did not. None of this was of any consequence anyway until the day, which invariably came, when I could see how the research results were being interpreted and used by institutions and agencies to more efficiently "civilize" us as a people. (I say institutions, with the meaning that institutions are composed of individuals; research is conducted by individuals, and interpreted and used by individuals. Institutions don't disrespect individuals; individuals do that.) (Pillwax, 1992, p. 8)

Shield

Shield Downey is the "strong silent type." When he visits he spends much of the time sitting on the bench looking at his hands. I also spend a lot of time looking at his hands. They are the biggest hands I have ever seen, fingers as thick as my wrists and a fist which appears as large as a football. At 55 years of age his strength is legendary in the Kobuk river valley. Young men in the village remember as children watching Shield helping unload the barge when it made its fall delivery of fuel oil. While other men would carefully roll the 50 gallon drums of fuel oil down the plank to the shore, Shield would lift the barrel by grabbing each end with his huge hands and carry it down the plank.

Even though he is a grandfather now, he is still a prodigious provider for his family. He is the only person in the village who still eschews the snowmobile and uses the dog sled exclusively for his winter hunting, wood gathering and traveling. This he explains by stating that if he gets injured or sick on the trail his dogs will bring him home, a snowmobile

will not. And his dogs never break down or run out of gas.

No one recalls ever seeing Shield angry or getting into a fight, although there is some mystery surrounding his young days on the coast before he married into the inland Inuit of the Kobuk. That's not exactly true about the anger; he does get angry with his dogs. I often hear him swearing at them in English, "God damn you sons of bitches!" I found this curious since he only speaks English when addressing white persons. When I asked him about that he said that there weren't any Inuit swear words, so he had to use English ones. When I asked him what people did for swear words before the white man came he grinned and said that he guessed they didn't get mad back then.

This is not as far-fetched as it seems. In the two years I lived in Ambler I rarely saw people display anger, and even on those rare occasions it was always alcohol induced. Whenever provoked by some apparent transgression the common reaction among both children and adults was, "Let 'em!" If a child told another child that someone had taken her crayons, she

would respond, "Let 'em." When an adult told another adult that someone had spoken out against him, he would respond, "Let 'em."

When I asked Shield about this he responded with a little metaphorical telling from his coastal childhood. He said that anger is like the waves in the ocean, when a person gets angry with you they go up like a big wave. If you also get angry and go up to meet that wave you will crash into each other and both are destroyed or damaged. However, if you stay down you can dive under the wave coming up unharmed while the wave crashes on the rocks behind you. Of course, Shield's physical strength probably contributed to a scarcity of angry challenges directed at him. I saw one dramatic example of this effect one summer evening.

On a July evening Shield was visiting when a young boy came running in to tell Shield that his son-in-law, Walter, was on a rampage. Walter was by far the roughest of the young men in the village. His roughness only became a big problem when he was in a drunken rage. Thankfully, this was not a frequent occurrence because the village had voted itself dry

some years before and the presence of alcohol was rare. On this night Walter had gotten drunk and beaten someone up. He had then gone home and was engaged in a fight with his wife, Shield's daughter Rosa, and was threatening to burn their cabin down. Shield got quickly to his feet and walked out of my cabin, with me following on his heels.

Walter was nearly a match for Shield in size and thirty years younger. At this time in my life I thought that meant something. When we entered the cabin Walter was screaming at Rosa and holding a can of gasoline in one hand. Rosa had a black eye and looked nervously at her father. Shield was, at least on the surface, very calm. He asked Walter what he was doing and Walter started screaming and swearing at him. Shield began to move in slow deliberate steps toward Walter. It was like magic. With each slow step Walter became less agitated until, by the time Shield was within hands reach (and remember what I said about those hands), Walter was crying and apologizing profusely for hurting Rosa and causing all the trouble. Shield escorted him quietly out of the

cabin and told him to go and sleep it off at his parents' house.

On another occasion Shield came knocking on the cabin door with a big chunk of moose meat as a gift. He was delivering a similar portion to each of the twenty homes in Ambler. I was grateful because fresh meat was rare in summer; the absence of the caribou and the lack of refrigeration meant that dried meat and fish formed the bulk of your diet. I was also a little surprised because it was early August and moose season didn't open until the first of September. When I teased Shield about this he sat down and recounted a story from his past.

When Shield was in his twenties he had his first and only run in with the law. At that time, enforcement agents of Alaska Fish and Game were making their first ventures into the far northern reaches. The aboriginal people living in the isolated areas of the territory, this was before statehood, were largely ignorant that there were new regulations on hunting. It was early August and Shield was hunting far up river from the village. With a growing young family

and twenty dogs to provide meat for, Shield spent much of his time hunting.

On this particular day Shield's luck was good. When I say "luck" here I am using the word that Shield, and other Ambler people, always used to describe successful hunts. Having hunted with Shield on many occasions I would be inclined to believe that his success had more to do with his incredible skill than it did with luck. However, that would be my white man's concept of luck, luck as random good fortune. It also reflects my white man's arrogance that my skill can control my fortune.

In any event, on this particular day Shield had shot a moose and was in the process of loading the meat into his boat when a small float plane landed on the river near him. A white man stepped ashore from the plane and came over to Shield's boat. Upon looking inside he said to Shield, "You got a moose, eh?" Shield confirmed with a remark about his good luck. The man then made a little friendly conversation, finally asking Shield if he would like to take a little ride in his airplane. Although he

had seen planes before, Shield had never ridden in one. This seemed like a good opportunity.

Shortly after they were airborne, the white man informed Shield that he was an enforcement officer for Alaska Fish and Game and that moose season did not open for two more weeks. Shield's limited English, combined with the confusing new notion of legal seasons for hunting certain animals, made it impossible for Shield to understand what was going on. Eventually the man told Shield he was under arrest. This he understood although he could not imagine what he was being arrested for.

To summarize what followed, Shield was taken to Nome and placed in jail where he was kept for 90 days. His family was not notified. The village initiated an agonizing search which resulted only in their finding his abandoned boat load of spoiled moose meat. They mourned his loss.

When Shield ultimately returned to his village and family his troubles were not over. He had missed the fall caribou migration and the river was frozen limiting the wood gathering potential. As a result of all of this Shield and his family had a very difficult

winter, surviving only on the village people's generosity with their own meager resources.

Since that event, more than twenty five years earlier, Shield had made it a ritual each year to shoot one moose in August and share the meat amongst the village households. Shield Downey doesn't get mad, he gets even.

The Foot Race

The village of Shungnak, Alaska is holding its annual "Eskimo Games." Having lived here for nearly two years, I feel compelled to participate in some way. As a result of my total lack of experience in "high kicking," "knuckle hopping," "ear pulling," and "finger wrestling," I now find myself standing on the starting line for the "foot race." It is early March and the world north of the Arctic circle is still white. The sun is shining, but the temperature is about -10 degrees Fahrenheit and the wind is blowing hard.

The starter describes the route we are to run. Since the description is in Inyupiak, I understand very little. I ask the young man next to me, "How

far?" I am stunned at his reply, "About twelve miles." Oh well, I used to run distances in high school and have run that far in training. There are twenty young Inuit men in the race. I feel confident I can compete since most of them are smokers and none of them have has formal training as long distance runners. I think to myself, "I am a trained athlete; I might even win this race!"

The gun sounds and they all take off as though they are running a hundred yard dash. I am surprised but quickly reason that they will soon burn themselves out, as no one could possibly maintain such a blistering pace. I suspect it is their lack of proper training that has caused them to make this tactical error. However, as I continue to run my well paced race the group in front of me pulls quickly away until I can no longer see them through the blowing snow. Still, I believe I will soon begin to overtake them as they tire and slow. After all, I am a trained athlete. I keep following their tracks in the snow.

Periodically, someone drives by on a snowmobile and asks if I am okay (sometimes they even have the gall to ask if I want a ride!). After about an hour

the tracks are growing faint in the drifting snow and it seems that there are fewer of them. I begin to worry that, should the tracks disappear completely, I may become lost. Fortunately, the tracks remain visible and I keep running. My delusions of winning have vanished but I remain determined to finish the race.

After almost two hours, now following what appear to be only two or three sets of footprints, I see the village ahead. There are three young children at the finish line, smiling as I cross. One of them has a clipboard and I ask him how I did. I know I finished last but I am curious to know by how far. He tells me that I finished in fourth place. Fourth?! I feel a touch of pride at this, but then they ask me why I kept running. After all, they inform me, prize money is awarded only to the first three finishers. Everyone else in the race had the common sense to catch a snowmobile ride when they realized they wouldn't finish in the top three. Nobody could understand why the white guy was still running.

I guess they don't know what it means to be a "trained athlete."

North, In Quest of Stories

The Yukon in June, what a great idea! My friend Ian is always looking for stories and the Yukon International Story Telling Festival sounded like an event he needed to attend. Because of my own interest in story and my teaching experience in Alaska, Ian invited me to go along. Since my camper van seemed the logical vehicle, I agreed to pick Ian up at his ranch in Dunvegan, and from there we would head up the Alaska Highway to Whitehorse. A few days prior to our departure Ian called to ask if there would be room for a friend to join us. Of course there was, so the trip was on.

I left Edmonton at 7 A.M. and arrived at Ian's ranch near Dunvegan at around noon. Ian introduced me to our traveling companion, Lester, while he prepared a lunch for us before our departure. Then we packed tent, grub box, bed rolls, and duffel bags in the van and headed north.

Since Ian and I both had commitments which limited our time this would be a whirlwind trip. In order to maximize our time in Whitehorse I elected to

drive straight through the night. This was not as bad as it sounds as it is light all night during June, once you get north of Watson Lake. We stopped and cooked a late supper at Muncho Lake with caribou and Dall sheep wandering on the road nearby. Both Ian and Lester were excited about traveling to the Yukon since neither had been this way before. Lester said it had always been a dream of his, having heard stories about the Yukon as a child. They were both too keyed up to sleep and kept me company through the night. We were all three tired but running on adrenaline when we arrived in Whitehorse the next morning.

After a breakfast at the Whitehorse A&W we set out to find a place to camp. The in town campground was for tents only and the RV park was an austere parking lot for motor homes so we drove out of town in search of a more appealing campsite. We turned off on a road that promised a Yukon River viewpoint. From the viewpoint we followed a dirt road to the bank of the Yukon. It was not an official campground but the remnants of campfires indicated that others had camped here before us.

The most striking thing about the Yukon River is its color, a beautiful clear blue green. It is not like glacial river water, opaque from the glacial loess which gives it its green color. The Yukon's color is more like the aqua water of the Caribbean, in that you can see deeply to the river bottom below. The water is very deep and the current is fast as it moves through the narrow deep walled channel.

As soon as we had picked a spot and parked, Lester was out of the van and scrambling down the steep bank to the edge of the river. Ian and I unloaded some gear and sprayed ourselves with mosquito repellent (yes, what they say about Yukon mosquitoes is true!). We scouted around for a good spot for the tent. Lester, meanwhile, had been standing motionless by the side of the river. Ian and I began to wonder what he was up to. After quite some time Lester climbed back up the bank to where we were standing. There were tears in his eyes. He told us that when he was a child his grandfather used to tell him stories about the days when the Peace River was blue. He never really believed this since the Peace had been brown for his entire life. When he saw the Yukon

River he realized that his grandfather's stories had been true.

The festival was incredible. People from around the circumpolar world have come to Whitehorse to share their stories, poems, music and dance. The big tents provided venues for traditional story tellers from Alaska, Canada, Scandinavia, and Siberia, along with aboriginal dancing-drumming-singing groups, and even a Swiss alpenhorn player. At least they did until a huge wind storm blew them down. No matter, the festival quickly re-located to the college without missing a beat. With the combination of the storytelling, round dancing, and our non-stop sightseeing, the weekend went by all too fast.

On Sunday we decided to leave Whitehorse early in order to get in a side trip to Skagway, Alaska. The temptation of being only 180 km from this famous gold rush town was just too great to resist. After a brief stop in Skagway for lunch and souvenir shopping we were on the road for home. As with most holidays the trip home wasn't quite as exciting as the trip out.

This time Ian and Lester took turns staying awake to keep me company as I drove through the night. We

talked about our favorite stories and musicians from the festival and our most memorable experiences from the trip. Mine were the young throat singers from Iqaluit and the Inuit dancers from Hooper Bay, Alaska. Ian had added a number of new stories to his repertoire. For Lester it was the blue river. He was looking forward to bringing his son to Whitehorse the next year. His son wouldn't have to wait his whole life to see what the Peace looked like before the pulp mills.

What Ground is Stolen?

Colónization

When I originally chose "Teaching on Stolen Ground" as the title of this inquiry I had a fairly straight forward notion of its appropriateness. I was thinking primarily of the fact that this continent had been stolen by European colonizers from the indigenous peoples who had populated it for more than thirty thousand years prior to the arrival of Cristobal Colón (I find it amazing that I have only now learned the origin of word "colón-ize!"). In this light all

teaching done on this continent is being done on stolen ground.

However, the real estate is not the only ground which has been, or continues to be, stolen by the process of colonization. When the early colonists "purchased" what is now Manhattan Island from its aboriginal inhabitants for the fabled "$26 worth of beads and trinkets," the mere introduction of the idea that land could be owned, bought, and sold began a process which stole much more than real estate. It was an early step in a continuing process of robbing this continent's aboriginal people of their historical ways of being in the world.

This "ground stealing" continues today in processes of acculturation and education which patronizingly pretend to prepare First Nations peoples to participate successfully in North American society. The quotation from Cora Pilwax's master's thesis at the beginning of this section makes a powerful statement that even our ways of researching culture contribute to this destructive process. In this sense the question of whether we are living in colonial or

post-colonial times must remain open, for, again, the answer may be "both."

In order to explore more deeply the implications of stealing a people's way of being (the ways they are grounded) in the world, we must look at what is lost and what, if anything, is offered in its place. In an attempt to do this I find it helpful to again explore aspects of presence, experience, story, and representation.

Being Present in the World

Time for human beings sprang into existence with our language and self consciousness. With our resulting ability to look back at our past and forward to envision our future, we acquired the ability to step out of the present. Time as something measured/measurable is a human, largely Western and modern, invention. Because our experience of time is rooted in the language of our thoughts, it is not unreasonable to acknowledge the possibility that people of different languages and cultures experience time in different ways. The work of researchers on the human ability to use language (Vygotsky, Chomsky) and the ways in which the structures of different

languages (grammar, verb tense, etc.), impact on how people think supports this possibility (Worff, Humbolt).

I do not want, in this inquiry, to become bogged down in conceptualizing this notion but rather just to accept its possibility and to examine how these differences between cultures in the experiencing of presence and time might play themselves out in the ways in which people live. Max van Manen (1995) points out the need to avoid over conceptualizing:

> A return to the lived experience of the pedagogic life world should resist the temptation to conceptualize for fear of alienating itself immediately from the very experiences of which it attempts to speak. It is exactly to the extent that we attempt to conceptualize the life world of pedagogy that we are denied a grasp of the original world we have been trying to reach. (p. 46)

In searching/researching a better understanding of the cultures of others the task is complicated by our lack of "common ground" and, worse, by the misassumption that the ground is, in fact, common: that the world

(time, space, matter, presence) is the same for everyone.

In this context a passage from Peter Høeg's novel, Smilla's Sense of Snow (1994), resonates strongly with van Manen. The character Smilla, a woman whose mother was Inuit and father Danish, contemplates cross-cultural understanding:

> There is one way to understand another culture. LIVING it. Move into it, ask to be tolerated as a guest, learn the language. At some point understanding may come. It will always be wordless. The moment you grasp what is foreign, you will lose the urge to explain it. To explain a phenomenon is to distance yourself from it. When I start talking about Qaanaaq, to myself or to others, I again start to lose what has never truly been mine. (p.204)

Interestingly, Smilla also seems to echo the personal ambivalence and tension I feel in my lifelong search for understanding:

> Deep inside I know that trying to figure things out leads to blindness, that the desire to understand has a built-in brutality that erases

> what you seek to comprehend. Only experience is sensitive. But maybe I am both weak AND brutal. I have never been able to resist trying. (p.261)

Is this not the same tension that John Farella speaks of in the previously quoted passage:

> Ultimately I am neither a stylist nor a scientist since I see the tendency of both to reify as distorting rather than enhancing discovery and representation. What that leaves is some stories with reflections. You see I also cannot simply tell the story; I have to think about it and tell the readers my thoughts, hit the reader over the head with the meaning. This is why the people in my tribe write poor fiction: they cannot simply let the story speak for itself; they need to make sure the reader gets the point. We think a lot about experience, sometimes to the point that we eliminate it. (1993, p. 14)

AND might our weakness be our inability to resist Heidegger's call of language and our brutality the result of "...the experience of the lack of a word for Being...which allows what must remain unsaid to

withdraw even as it comes to expression"(Heidegger in Rodeheffer, 1990, p. 134)?

It strikes me that John Dewey's famous statement that philosophy progresses not by solving problems but by abandoning them is not exactly true; rather, they are set aside and inevitably, and periodically, returned to. Since I said I didn't want to become "bogged down" perhaps I should set aside this conceptualizing and return to my attempt to attend to the experience of being present in the world.

Living in Different Worlds

In a cosmic sense, human conceptions of time are meaningless. Nietzsche exposed this absurdity of human arrogance in a little narrative:

> Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history," but nevertheless it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. (Nietzsche in *On Truth and*

Lying in the Extramoral Sense quoted in Caputo, 1993, p. 16)

However, the arrogance that Nietzsche was attacking is not a universal human characteristic. It is primarily Western and modern, born of a desire to control the world which resulted in the creation of the modern illusion that controlling the world is possible. Peter Høeg, through the character Smilla, speaks to the differences of world views inherent in different cultures and languages:

> *Sinik* is not a distance, not a number of days or hours. It is both a spatial and a temporal phenomenon, a concept which describes the union of space and motion and time which is taken for granted by Inuits but cannot be captured by ordinary speech in any European language....The European measurement of distance, the standard meter in Paris, is quite different. It is a concept for reshapers, for those whose primary view of the world is that it must be transformed. Engineers, military strategists, prophets. (p.336)

"Indian time". Nancy Potts, an elder of Alexis Reserve, refers to these conflicting ways of experiencing time:

> Observing the height of the sun in the sky, Nancy stands up. "If I had a tipi, I'd tell you what time it was. When the sun comes straight down, right in the middle, it's dinnertime. But I guess the old people ate whenever they got hungry. They didn't have clocks. The only time was sunrise and sunset."
>
> "Indian time," she snorts, as we gather our teacups. "That's what white people say when we're late, but they're the ones who made it. They should call it 'white-man's time,'" she jokes, as we head into the house for soup. (in Meile, 1991)

I could not count the number of times in my life that I have heard white people denigrate First Nations people for what they perceive to be an irresponsible (and even illogical) attitude towards time.

White man's time. Because we have built our culture around structures which are dependent on the clock we are blind to the absurdity of that system.

We are required by a beep from our wrist to stop whatever we are doing, even though what we are doing may be both important and engaging, in order to be "on time." Is this more logical than doing what needs to be done until it is done?

Clearly, in our system, our clocks are necessary and our reliance on them is logical. However, that logic, like all logic, is internal to the system and not indicative of some universal truth. As Amy Potts said, we should call it "white man's time," we invented it.

The Moment

We are all born into it. At birth the world comes to us as a big surprise. It commands our full attention. The present is all we know. As we grow older our attention becomes divided between the world and our selves. We gradually acquire the language to conjugate ourselves out of the moment, yet we never lose the need to experience living in the moment.

Presence for Sale

"Each day is a gift. That's why they call it the present." I have heard this little "saying" several times in the last year and I have no idea where or when it originated. Hearing it has caused me to reflect on how many aphorisms there are that have to do with the illusive space/time/non-time/non-space we call "the moment." How many times have I heard statements like: live life one day at a time, live each moment as if it was your last, live like there's no tomorrow, you only go around once so make the most of it, there's no time like the present, life is too short to waste one precious moment of it.

It seems ironic that the moment, which came to us originally as the "gift" of our presence in the world, has become something synthetically contrived and even marketed. What else is a ride on the Mind Bender roller coaster if not a seven dollar taste of the moment? The more we plan and schedule ourselves out of the moment and protect ourselves from the dangers of the world, the more we are drawn to theme parks, hang gliding, down hill skiing, wall climbing, adventure holidays, IMAX theaters, and Stephen King

novels. And for the real "couch potatoes" we have television, presence in a box. Is it possible that our absolutely fundamental need to experience the moment might have resulted in a society where millions of people pay billions of dollars for the vicarious experience of watching multi-millionaire athletes perform on television?

Might this also be what causes people to shove money into a video lottery terminal, play bingo, and bet on the horse races? Could they be begging for life to surprise them? Why else would anyone take crack cocaine or drink themselves into a stupor if not to shed their self consciousness, their history, and their future in the all too brief drug induced euphoria of the moment.

The more privileged among us can fulfill this need by "losing ourselves" in a beautiful piece of music played by a symphony orchestra, a $500 seat to hear Pavarotti in concert, and trips to Las Vegas or Monte Carlo instead of video lottery at the corner pub.

Presence for Free

The irony is that the world offers us this euphoric experience of the moment "free of charge." Annie Dillard, in her Pulitzer Prize winning non-fiction Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (1974), speaks compellingly and evocatively of this moment of presence. She recounts a particular sunset in a particular place at a particular time, once upon a time, which resonates strongly with the mountain sunsets which are forever present inside of me:

> Shadows lope along the mountain's rumpled flanks; they elongate like root tips, like lobes of spilling water, faster and faster. A warm purple pigment pools in each ruck and tuck of the rock; it deepens and spreads, boring crevasses, canyons. As the purple vaults and slides, it tricks out the unleafed forest and rumpled rock in gilt, in shape-shifting patches of glow. These gold lights veer and retract, shatter and glide in a series of dazzling splashes, shrinking, leaking, exploding. The ridge's bosses and hummocks sprout bulging from its side; the whole mountain looms miles closer; the light

> warms and reddens; the bare forest folds and pleats itself like living protoplasm before my eyes, like a running chart, a wildly scrawling oscillograph on the present moment....I am more alive than all the world. (p. 79-80)

I have never seen the Virginia mountains of Annie Dillard, but my own mountains and my own presence slip easily and unbidden into the space her words create.

The world doesn't require anything so big and grand as a mountain to bring us into presence; it can catch us with the little miracles as well:

> One day I was walking along Tinker Creek and thinking of nothing at all and I saw the tree with the lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. I stood on the grass with the lights in it, grass that was wholly fire, utterly focused and utterly dreamed. It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance...I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it until at that moment I was lifted and struck.(Dillard, 1974, p.39)

How is it possible that something so mundane as sunlight shining on a tree in your own back yard could result in such an Epiphany?

No, the world doesn't need mountains or lightning bolts to amaze us. All that is required is our full attention. When I was a child my father told me a joke about a donkey. As I recall, a man bought a donkey to pull his cart. The person who sold it to him had said that the donkey was well trained and followed directions perfectly; softly spoken verbal commands ("Go, stop, left, right") were all that was needed to guide the donkey. However, when the man harnessed the donkey to his cart it refused to move. No amount of yelling or coaxing could get the donkey to move. Angry that he had been duped, the man returned to the seller and demanded his money back. The seller accompanied the man back to see what the problem was. The buyer told the seller to try to get the donkey to pull the cart. The seller picked up a "two by four" post from the side of the road and hit the donkey with it, square between the eyes. The donkey then responded to the man's quiet verbal commands and pulled the cart wherever it was

instructed. The buyer was outraged; he said that he was told that polite verbal commands were all that were necessary to guide the donkey. The seller said, "Yes, that's true, but first you have to get his attention."

The Rocky Mountains, Victoria Falls, the Grande Canyon, these are nature's "two by fours," they hit us between the eyes and demand our full attention. But the miracle is always there: in the opening of a single flower, in the morning dew shining on a spider's web, in the microscopic life in a drop of pond water. It only needs our unself-conscious attention.

Presence Obscured

Unfortunately, in the "modern" world unself-consciousness is not easy to come by. It is almost as though we are obsessed with self-consciousness. After all, that's what separates us from the animals. And for some reason my culture decided that it was extremely important that we separate ourselves from the animals:

> It is ironic that the one thing that all religions recognize as separating us from our

> creator--our very self-consciousness--is also the one thing that divides us from our fellow creatures. It was a bitter birthday present from evolution, cutting us off at both ends. (Dillard, 1974, p. 85)

Annie Dillard is certainly not the first to reflect on this, or the first to find it necessary, like Thoreau before her, to return to nature for a change of perspective. It seems that periodically we re-discover something that many of the world's aboriginal peoples have known and accepted all along, that we are only a very small part of a very great and mysterious universe. In order to consume and control the world we had to separate ourselves from it. Annie Dillard comments:

> Self consciousness is the curse of the city and all that sophistication implies. It is the glimpse of oneself in a storefront window, the unbidden awareness of reactions on the faces of other people...Innocence is a better world. ...What I call innocence is the spirit's unself-conscious state at any moment of pure devotion to

> any object. It is at once a receptiveness and total concentration. (1974, p. 82-83)

One of the joys of teaching very young children is that they have yet to learn self-consciousness and their "innocence" makes them receptive to the world around them in a very powerful way. I learned in my first child psychology course that we humans learn at our fastest rate in our earliest years, before, as Annie Dillard says, we begin to "waste most of our energy just by spending every waking minute saying hello to ourselves" (1974, p. 84).

To be sure, a great deal of what we do in schools requires children to be more self-conscious, not less. This becomes increasingly the case as a child moves through the grades and evaluation and competition become bigger parts of the process. This is justified by the notion that we are preparing young people to survive in "the real world." Apart from the obvious questions this raises regarding how education can contribute to creating a better, and perhaps different, world, it is of huge significance when the structure of that "real world" which is the "given"

for which children are being prepared is in direct conflict with the world view of another culture.

Presence Stolen

In the final section of this inquiry, I will explore some implications this has for education and teacher education but, for now, let me close with the statement that stolen ground remains stolen. The colonizers of North America will never return the land and leave. And neither will there ever be adequate compensation made for the value of the real estate which was stolen or the lives which were lost to disease or warfare in the process of colonization. That history is unchangeable and must remain part of our/my own history.

What must change is the role education plays in a continuing process of colonization through the "stealing of ground" which results from the loss of a people's fundamental ways of being grounded in the world. In the last section of this thesis I will attempt to share some viewpoints of those whose ground was, and continues to be, stolen and also explore some possible ways education might change (and in some cases is changing) in promising directions, which

offer at least the possibility for people, and all other living creatures, to continue to live together on this planet.

Ultimately, this elusive "no-thing" called presence (the present, the moment) is so important because it is the one "ground" on which we are indeed "all in this together." It is a ground where we have not yet turned our gaze back upon our self to see our self as separate from the world. In the present we are not yet one of an infinite number of individual parts to the world because before the "I" speaks the world, the world is a unity without parts.

Chapter Five

Heeding the Call

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
mere skill and little gain;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
thrown by an eternal partner
with accurate and measured swing
towards you, to your center, in an arch
from the great bridge building of God:
why catching then becomes a power--
not yours, a world's.
(Rainer Maria Rilke in Gadamer, 1986, p. v)

The Longest Ride

Take the Greyhound,

it's a doggone way to get around. (Chapin, 1975)

My Buddy

I am really dreading this! Fifty-five hours on the bus! I haven't many choices, though. My truck has been repaired and is ready to be picked up. I can't believe it decided to blow a head gasket 1,600 miles from Edmonton. Now, two months later, I'm having to return to New Mexico to bring it home. And, with only a week until Christmas, there was no chance of getting a decent air fare. The choice was simple: a $142 bus ticket or $1,150 by air. No contest.

Oh well, I'm off on my adventure; first stop Calgary! Guess again. This is the milk run; it takes the old highway, and stops ten times between Edmonton and Calgary. We finally pull into the Calgary station at 5 a.m. There is a two hour layover until I catch my next bus to the Canadian-US border.

There are quite a few people in the station; this close to Christmas, a lot of people are riding the

bus. I find a chair in the section closest to my gate and I settle down to join the rest of the napping passengers. The nap doesn't last long.

There is a man making his way up the concourse carrying a huge duffel bag, and swearing at the top of his lungs. His swearing seems directed at no one in particular, but he is really putting his heart into it. He staggers and sways, but it is impossible to say whether it is the weight of the huge bag or chemicals in his blood stream causing his lack of coordination. I suspect it is a combination of both.

A security guard appears from a doorway and moves to intercept. His expression clearly shows that this is definitely not the way he wanted his shift to go. He politely asks the man to keep his voice down and stop swearing. The man seems delighted to now have a focus for his anger and he turns full force on the security guard. The expression on the guard's face drops another notch as he realizes that this is not going to be easy.

He orders the man to follow him to the security office. The man begins to rant and rave that he is being harassed for no reason. He doesn't understand

why the guard is picking on him. Now the guard is mad. He insists forcefully that the man follow him into the office. Reluctantly, but not quietly, the man complies. The door closes behind them and a few minutes of welcome silence ensues.

A short time later the door opens and the security guard escorts the man out and over to a pay phone located, unfortunately, right in the middle of the section in which I am seated. He tells the man to call his friend for a ride, and to behave himself until his ride arrives. The man mutters something softly and I begin to think that the storm is over. The guard apparently thinks so too, as he decides to continue his rounds at the opposite end of the concourse. This proves to be a premature decision.

With great difficulty, the man inserts a coin and dials a number on the pay phone. No answer. His quarter is not returned. He now turns to face us and his voice begins to elevate as he tells us of the conspiracy. It seems that some mysterious forces are attempting to "fuck with his mind." My fellow travelers all seem to be feigning sleep or pretending

to be engrossed in their books. They are much smarter than I am.

When he realizes that he is being ignored, he begins to rail at everyone for their apathy. Apparently, only a concerted force of will, in combination with very loud swearing, can prevent the mysterious forces from taking over your mind. He is convinced that all these apathetic people in front of him are doomed. He screams, "You are all fucked!" Then, he notices me. Like an idiot, I am looking him straight in the eyes. He walks over and puts his arm on my shoulder and says, "But not you and me, eh buddy?" He is happy; he is no longer alone. He has found a kindred spirit. He continues railing at the others, but now, instead of saying "I," he says "we." "We" are the only two who know what's going on, the only two who will escape the forces of evil. There is still no one looking him in the eyes. Now they are all looking at his "buddy."

I am greatly relieved when the security guard returns and VERY forcefully escorts the man to the station exit. He tells him, "It's your choice, jail or outside!" I am impressed by the security guard's

self restraint, evidenced by his not having called the police long ago. I am glad that this is the case, as it seems obvious that there is more going on in this man's life than just a few drinks too many. And besides, who wants to see their "buddy" go to jail a week before Christmas?

Buffalo Bill

The next six hundred miles of my odyssey passes like a dream. I feel as though I am in a Woody Allen film. I can think of no better reality check than a cross country bus trip, especially at Christmas time. It seems as though all the people on these busses, no matter how down on their luck they are, just HAVE to get home for Christmas. I suspect that if politicians all had to travel by bus we might begin to see legislation and programs which better served the people who live at the margins of society. Time passes and the journey continues.

There is a closet tour guide for a bus driver on the route from Calgary to the US border, reciting a continuous monologue describing every historical, geographical, and geological detail about the country we are traveling through. Never have I learned so

much in such a short distance. At the border we are dropped off, not at a station or a customs building. We are just deposited by the side of the road.

After a half hour standing by the road we are picked up in a thirty-five year old bus for the short trip into Great Falls. The journey takes an exciting turn as we enter Great Falls. I see a man in a motorized wheelchair coming into the road. At first I am sure he will see the bus and stop. Then, realizing he will not, I assume that the bus driver will see the wheelchair and stop. Too late, it becomes obvious that the bus driver is not aware of the impending collision. All of us come to this conclusion simultaneously and convulsively inhale. I am certain that if it hadn't been for the screams of those few of us in the front seats who were able to exhale, the bus would have hit him. The driver swerved sharply as we waited for the "thump" and then drove on to the station as though nothing unusual had occurred.

Following a five hour lay-over, spent loitering around a shopping center in Great Falls, I board my fourth bus for the leg to Billings, Montana. This is another small regional bus line with antiquated

equipment and very little leg room. However, since it is night time I am able to sleep, only occasionally being awakened by crying babies. We arrive in Billings at 2 a.m. and I must wait another two hours before boarding the next bus for Cheyenne, Wyoming. The old bus station is crowded and chaotic, but at this hour there really isn't anyplace else to go.

The collection of people in the station is amazing. It is so incredibly diverse. Not the diversity of people you see in an airport or a shopping mall, but something quite different: people in extremely soiled clothing, people with bad injuries and physical deformities, people with terrible tuberculin coughs, people stoned on alcohol and/or drugs. Now I know why the first announcement the bus drivers make each time we depart a station is that no alcohol or drug use is permitted on the bus. I've never heard a flight attendant make that announcement. I feel as though I am on a foreign continent, if not on a foreign planet. There is a young woman traveling alone with six children, all appearing to be under the age of five. They are totally out of control, and the ambulatory ones careen screaming around the station

while their mother lays the infants one by one on the linoleum floor to change their disposable diapers. Although I hope that they all get where they need to be for Christmas, I pray silently that they are not traveling on my bus.

To escape this bedlam I go into the coffee shop. Perhaps, I will have a burger. Perhaps, not. The roof of the old station is leaking and the ceiling tiles hang in shreds above the tables. There is a bucket sitting on one side of the grill to catch the brown water dripping from the ceiling, while burgers are sizzling on the other side. Errant drops miss the bucket and the sizzling increases. I order a canned soda and sit at a table to await my departure.

A man comes through the door and makes his way to a table. Everyone seems to know him and he begins "holding court" and telling stories. To say that he is interesting looking would be an extreme understatement. He is tall, gaunt, toothless, and appears to be around fifty years old (and a very eventful fifty years, I imagine). His black hair and beard look very much like the tintype pictures of Buffalo Bill. This resemblance is strengthened by his

attire: a long black buckskin coat with beadwork and fringe all over it, black jeans, a black cowboy boot, and a black wooden peg leg. He walks using a crutch hand hewn from the branch of a tree. The next hour and a half passes very quickly as I watch and listen to this amazing character.

In addition to the "locals" gathered to listen, I notice some of my fellow travelers have been drawn to the story teller. One young man from my bus is sitting rapt and wide eyed as "Buffalo Bill" spins his yarns. For me, the look in the boy's eyes hearkens back to a time in my life, before television, when I would sit "rapt and wide eyed" listening to my grandfather telling stories of the pioneer days in northern Michigan. It is a look I haven't seen often enough in the eyes of the children I have taught.

Kyle

The bus to Cheyenne is one of those mini-busses, like the ones used as hotel or car rental shuttles at major airports, very cramped as the seats are jammed in to get the maximum number of passengers possible. It is about 2 a.m. as we pull out of Billings and I try to go immediately to sleep.

For the next 200 miles, whenever I wake up, I am aware of a particular voice which seems to be continuously engaged in conversation. It is the voice of a young boy, the same young boy I had noticed listening to "Buffalo Bill," and I realize that I have been hearing this voice since leaving Great Falls. I think it catches my attention because it sounds very much like my sister Janie's son John. This boy not only has the same east Texas accent as John, but also the same polite, friendly manner, and eagerness to strike up conversation with strangers. I hear him saying "Yes, ma'am," and "yes, sir," and asking people strings of questions about where they live and what it's like where they come from. When John was this boy's age, fourteen perhaps, Janie was always admonishing him to be careful about talking to strangers. She would confide to me that John was too naive and she worried what would become of him. If Janie were here on this bus I'm sure she would caution this boy in a similar fashion.

We stop at Sheridan, Wyoming around 6 a.m. for breakfast and a driver change. The new driver is a retired rodeo rider and is full of western lore and

cowboy jokes, and he keeps us all laughing as we roll along. Unfortunately, the rolling along doesn't last. A bright red light on the dash gets the driver's attention and the coolant temperature dial is reading maximum. We pull off to the side of the road. He informs us the motor is overheating. When he opens the hood a cloud of steam billows out. The mood on the bus changes dramatically. People begin worrying out loud about friends expecting them, connections they will miss, and all the other ramifications this delay will cause.

After allowing the engine to cool down, we make it to a roadhouse five miles further on. Once there, the driver phones his company to find out what to do. We wait anxiously while he makes this call and I begin to consider hitch-hiking. He soon returns with the news: a bus has been dispatched from Torrington and will arrive in two hours to take us the rest of the way to Cheyenne. Moans and groans abound from all of us missing connections. I am not that upset as I am tired and hungry, and a long lunch sounds like a good idea. But then, I don't have Christmas waiting for me at the end of this journey.

I take a table in the cafe and order a burger, fries, and a Coke. There is a newspaper on the table and I begin reading while I wait for my order. The young man with my nephew's voice approaches my table and asks, "Pardon me, sir. Mind if I join you?" I tell him to have a seat and we exchange introductions. His name is Kyle and he asks me where I am headed. When I respond, "New Mexico," he tells me that he's never been there but that he used to live in Texas. This explains why his accent reminded me so much of my nephew. He is a clean cut young man and his polite manner makes his company a pleasant diversion.

The waitress returns with my order and I ask Kyle if he wants to order something. He says no, that he's not hungry but he could use a glass of water. We continue to talk while I eat and he drinks his water. I finish my burger but, as usual, I can't finish the mountain of fries typical of truck stop and road house cafes. I ask Kyle if he wants any and he says, "No, I'm all right, you go ahead and eat them." When I tell him that if he doesn't eat them they will go to waste, he changes his mind. As I watch him wolf them down I realize that he is very hungry. I order myself

another Coke and ask him if I can buy him one. He declines but I insist. He is inordinately profuse in his thanks as the driver calls us to board our replacement bus to Cheyenne.

Due to our delay we arrive in Cheyenne too late for my connection to Denver. The next bus is not until 5 P.M., four hours from now! Oh well, it's a great opportunity to see a little of downtown Cheyenne. As I while away the afternoon shooting straight pool in a "family" billiard parlor, I think about what I've learned about Kyle in the last few hours. He has been living for the past five months with his brother and his wife in Great Falls. His brother is stationed there with the US air force and Kyle's parents thought it would be good for him to live there for awhile. Kyle has lived in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, and Missouri. When I asked him if his dad was in the military service and got moved around a lot he said, "No, my stepfather just doesn't like to stay in one place very long." He has moved so frequently that his schooling has suffered and now he is "kind of behind." He wants to

finish school and some day own his own gas station. He likes helping people and working on cars.

When I ask Kyle why he is going back to Missouri he says it is hard living with his brother and his wife; he always feels like he is "in the way." When I ask if he had made friends in Great Falls he said, "Sure, and new friends are okay, but they're not like your old friends." For some reason Kyle considers Missouri to be home and is happy to be going back to his "old friends."

The bus ride into Denver is only three hours but the bus is jammed and I am seated next to an old man who has been urinating in his clothes. The trip seems considerably longer than three hours.

In the Denver bus station I run into Kyle again. My bus to Santa Fe leaves in half an hour and his bus for St. Louis in an hour and a half. He decides to keep me company as I wait in line at my gate. I ask him if he doesn't want to get a bite to eat before his next bus and he says not. I ask him if he has any money. "No, but I will be home in another twelve hours." I only have thirty dollars and, since my

account has been cleaned out to pay the truck repair, bank machines are of no use to me. Anyway, I take a twenty dollar bill from my pocket and offer it to him. He says that he is all right and couldn't take my money. I insist and stick it his shirt pocket, and tell him to go to the Arby's and get something to eat. He thanks me, OVER AND OVER, then shakes my hand, says good-bye, and heads off toward Arby's.

About ten minutes later I feel a hand go in my back pocket. Kyle has returned the twenty and says he just didn't feel right taking my money, "You might need it." I put the twenty back in his shirt pocket and say that I really want him to have it. He says he wants my address so he can pay me back. I tell him I am rich and twenty dollars means nothing to me. Then we both laugh at how ridiculous my statement is, as if a rich person would be riding all-night busses the week before Christmas! My bus is boarding and we shake hands again. Then, out of the blue, he asks me what I do for a living. When I tell him I am a teacher he says, "I KNEW you were a teacher!"

The night ride from Denver to Santa Fe goes quietly. I sleep most of the way, but when I'm not

sleeping I wonder what the future holds for Kyle and how he "knew" I was a teacher. When I was Kyle's age my friends and I thought we could spot a teacher by their cheap worn out shoes, but I am wearing expensive new runners so that can't be it. At first I feel sad to think I will never know the answers to these questions. Later I begin to believe that maybe, in some way, I do know those answers.

The Cowboy

I arrive in Santa Fe at seven in the morning. I phone my friend in Taos to come and pick me up. Taos is 75 miles from Santa Fe so I will be waiting an hour and a half for my ride. There are only three people in the station: the clerk behind the counter, an old Hispanic gentleman, and myself. A little conversation in Spanish with the old man informs me that he is an artisan from Mexico hired to do some stone work on a big "mansion" being built by a local rancher. After a short while a van with the words, "Rancho Encantado" on the side arrives to pick the old man up. Now it's just me and the clerk. I try to catch a little more sleep.

A short while later a pickup truck pulls up in front and a young cowboy disembarks grabbing a duffel bag and a guitar case from the back. This is no drugstore cowboy; his shirt, jeans, well worn boots, and sweat stained hat all say that this young man works cattle for a living. He shakes the driver's hand and comes into the station. He moves to the counter and asks the clerk how much it costs for a ticket to Colorado Springs. The clerk responds, "Forty dollars." The cowboy says, "Damn! How much to go to Pueblo?" "Thirty-five dollars," is the clerk's answer. The cowboy asks sadly, "How about Trinidad?" "Thirty," says the clerk. Finally, the cowboy says, "Sir, I have fourteen dollars. How far will that get me?" The clerk informs him that fourteen dollars will get him a ticket to Springer, about a third of the way to Colorado Springs.

The cowboy heaves a big sigh and says, "Sir, I've got to get to Colorado Springs. I've been working on a ranch in Arizona and a couple of days ago my sister phoned to tell me my mom is going in the hospital tomorrow for an operation for the cancer. I've just

got to get home!" He explains that he hitch hiked all day yesterday and got to Santa Fe late last night and stood all night on the highway, in near freezing temperatures, but just couldn't get a ride.

The clerk feels badly but explains that there is nothing he can do about ticket prices. He tells the cowboy that if he just had twenty-five dollars he could get a ticket to Raton and that Raton was such a busy place he could probably catch a ride from there.

The young cowboy thanks the clerk politely and says he will try to call his sister to see if she can help him. He goes to the pay phone and phones his sister collect. I hear him asking about his mom and explaining his predicament. When he gets off the phone the clerk asks how he made out. He says the best his sister can do is come and pick him up if he can just get to Pueblo. Then the cowboy turns around and announces, "Anybody here want to buy my guitar?" He is looking at me because I am the only one in the station.

I tell him I don't have enough money to buy his guitar. He says he'll take whatever I have. He's just got to get home. He opens the case and shows me

the guitar. It's a nice old Martin easily worth two hundred dollars used, five hundred new. He confirms my assessment by telling me he bought it from a pawn shop several years ago for two hundred fifty dollars. It flashes through my mind that I could borrow a hundred dollars from my friend, who should be here any minute, and end up with a great deal on a good guitar. But then my conscience kicks in and I say, "You don't really want to sell this guitar." He says, "No sir. This old guitar is my traveling buddy. I'd hate to lose it, but I have to get home!"

I get out my last ten dollars, give it to him and tell him to get that ticket to Raton. "It will be warm by the time you get to Raton and you will catch a ride easy on that busy highway from there to Pueblo." Then the clerk exclaims, "Oh hell, here's another ten dollars! Let's just get you that ticket to Pueblo, then your sister can pick you up." The young cowboy is crying now; luckily, my friend arrives and I can get out of here before I start crying too. The young cowboy sticks out his hand and I respond with my own. His grip is strong as he shakes my hand vigorously. He then asks, "If you don't mind my asking, just what

line of work are you in?" "I'm a teacher," I reply. He smiles and says, "I thought you were either a teacher or a preacher." I think about that for a long time.

What a trip! So many people trying so hard just to get where they need to be.

Take the Greyhound.

It's a doggone way to get around.

It's a doggone easy way to get you down. (Chapin, 1975)

Sergeant at Arms

At Fort Ringold Junior High students stayed on track. In fact, tracking was an art form at Fort Ringold. When I was hired to teach eighth grade science the principal, Mr. Salinas, explained the system to me: "The Eight Ones are exceptionally bright and good. The Eight Two-A's are of average intelligence and good. The Eight Two-B's are of average intelligence and bad. The Eight Threes are of below average intelligence and extremely bad. The Eight Fours are either retarded or can't speak English." He also informed me that because I was a

new teacher and because the Eight Threes were so bad he was assigning one of the coaches as a teacher aide during my Eight Three class period.

The only role the coach/aide had was to keep order. He did this by standing at the front of the room glaring at anyone who talked. Whenever the glare failed to suffice he would grab the offender and slam him against the wall threatening to "beat the crap" out of him. Since he was a very large coach this intimidation always produced silence. It also made him the only staff member to have his tires slashed on a regular basis, a correlation he never seemed to grasp. After two days of this ongoing drama I asked the principal to reassign the coach elsewhere and let me try it with the Eight Threes on my own. I was afraid of them but not as much as I was of the coach.

I had noticed that while most of the boys seemed to relish the conflicts with the coach, one remained aloof. Interestingly, he was the one student who would have been the best match for the coach in size and strength. Gene Falcon was nearly 6 feet tall and weighed 200 pounds. His passion was football and he excelled at it. As a result he was a school hero.

Unfortunately, he had no passion at all for the rest of school. His grades were barely passing, hence his assignment to Eight Three. What I soon found out was that his marginal grades were strictly the result of his lack of interest. He would not participate or pay the least bit of attention in class, as though he were simply killing time until 3:30 when he could go play football. In spite of this, Gene would easily make his grade of "C" on tests, which was the minimum grade required to be eligible to play sports. I realized quickly that he was a very bright young man and decided to have a talk with him.

I told him that I thought he was smart and could make better grades if he tried harder. He just smiled and shrugged, as though he were amused that I had discovered his secret. I told him that even though it was easy for him to make a passing grade, for many of his classmates this was not the case; their misbehavior and lack of effort inevitably led to failing marks and retention. He nodded and said that the football team had lost some good players due to failing grades. At that point I realized I had my hook. I told him that the other students all looked

up to him and respected him and I asked him to be my sergeant at arms, helping me keep the other students in line and on task. Perhaps it was the title "sergeant at arms" that proved irresistible; in any event, he took the job. From that day forward we were a team and my classroom management problems were over.

In addition to the increased harmony and productivity in the class as a whole there was an interesting side effect. Gene's grades shot up. His other teachers also noted his improving marks, a fact for which I smugly, but silently, took credit. There was even talk of moving him to Eight Two-A. However, Gene didn't want to move and ultimately it was decided to let him finish the year in Eight Three.

In the years that followed, even though I was no longer living in Texas, I would occasionally get news of Gene in letters from friends. When he enrolled at the University of Texas to study LAW ENFORCEMENT I smugly took credit for both his academic success and his career choice. When he subsequently graduated with honors and became an officer in Texas's elite State Troopers I gave myself another pat on the back. And when a few years later he returned to his home and

was elected Starr County Sheriff, the first professional law enforcement officer to ever hold that office, I swelled with pride.

A couple of years later a friend called and told me to get the latest issue of the Sunday New York Times; it contained an article about the young sheriff of Starr County, Texas. It chronicled how Gene had "cleaned up" the biggest drug smuggling operation on the Texas-Mexico border. But before I could bask too long in the reflected glory of this story my friend called again about an article in Time Magazine. This article reported that a squad of assassins dressed like ninjas and carrying submachine guns had been dispatched by the Mexican Mafia to kill the sheriff of Starr County, Texas. They had crossed the Rio Grande River in the middle of the night and broken into Gene's house, "guns blazing." Gene had been shot several times and a couple of the would-be assassins had been shot by Gene; the rest had fled back to Mexico. Gene's wife and children survived, terrified but uninjured, huddled in the bedroom closet. It took months for Gene to recover from his wounds but ultimately he returned to his work. As for

me, I had to come to grips with the realization that if I am going to be arrogant enough to take credit for my students' successes, I had better be prepared to take the blame for their tragedies.

Mike

"...and his close friend David Calhoon..."

Obituaries are the ultimate example of both the power and the impotence of language. They are tiny little narratives telling in the briefest possible way the story of a person's death. When I first read Mike's obituary on the day it appeared in the paper I despaired at its hopeless inadequacy in communicating the event of Mike's death. When I read it today I am awestruck to find that all the joy Mike's friendship brought me, all the things he taught me about life and all the pain, frustration, and anger I experienced with his dying are called forth by those few words.

Strangers reading Mike's obituary in 1992 might, if they paused to reflect at all, have felt a little sadness at the death of one so young. Perhaps, because of some experience with grief in their own life, they may have felt some empathy for Mike's

family and friends, and maybe a passing curiosity at what caused his death at such a young age. But obituaries aren't for strangers anyway; obituaries are for friends and family.

Each friend and family member of Mike's who read this little "story" would have experienced it in profoundly different ways. The specific depth, complexity, and range of emotions they would have felt, and the memories evoked in them are impossible for me to know. However, I do know without a doubt that there are no words through which I can truly represent what Mike's living and dying meant to me. Still, I am compelled to try. I am compelled by my aching desire to share with others what I learned about life, and especially my life as a "teacher," through my friendship with this incredible young person.

Living in the Moment

Crazy kid. In the summer of 1988, while working on my master's degree at the University of Alberta, I took a job as a salesperson at a bicycle shop. It was pleasant work and I enjoyed the association with the twenty-five or so people who worked in the various

roles (sales, assembly, repair, management, etc.) in this thriving operation. The summer was a very busy time and the work atmosphere was almost always upbeat. Even the customers were a pleasure to deal with. Buying a bicycle, whether for yourself or a child, is a mostly fun thing to do. Consequently, I found selling them to be fun as well.

Across the alley from the bike store was the warehouse and assembly shop. And since the store sold nearly 6000 bicycles a year, as many as 100 in a single day in the early summer, this assembly shop was a very busy place. It was staffed by seven or eight mechanically inclined young men. The pace was very fast and there was always music blaring from a "ghetto blaster."

Whenever a bicycle was sold the sales person would take it to the assembly shop for a "tune up" before the customer would take it home. Because of this process, I would make as many as ten to twenty trips a day to the assembly shop. In addition to this I developed the habit of eating my lunch there; I found it enjoyable to watch them assembling bicycles while I ate my Circle K hot-dog and drank my Dr.

Pepper. I also enjoyed the non-stop conversation of the warehouse crew. It was during one of these excursions to the warehouse that I first met Mike.

On this particular morning I had sold a BMX bike to a young boy and had left the bike to be tuned. I was walking back to the warehouse to see if it was ready. The bike came flying out of the warehouse door piloted by a young man I hadn't seen before. He hit the front brake and stood the bike on its front wheel balancing it there for several seconds. He then rocked it onto the rear wheel and drove it in a tight circle with the front wheel high in the air, then back to the front wheel. This time, while standing on the front axle pegs, he spun the bike in a series of 360 degree spins. He then got off the bike and handed it to me and said it was "all tuned up and ready to go." That was not the usual "test drive" and I was amazed by the young mechanic's ability to do what, to me, seemed magically impossible. I went back into the store asking, "Who is that crazy kid?"

Jerry, the store's owner, told me that the young man's name was Mike and that he seemed like a "pretty good kid." He said Mike used to be a "free-style" BMX

enthusiast, hence his riding skill. I later found out that in addition to his skill at riding bicycles, he was also an "artist" at assembling, tuning, and repairing them. But this was just my first superficial impression and, like all first impressions, it was just the "tip of the iceberg."

In retrospect, I believe that one of the reasons I enjoyed taking my lunch and breaks in the warehouse had to do with my experience as a Jr. High teacher. I have always had a special affinity for those young people who were referred to as "problem students" or "trouble-makers" or "rough kids," the ones who just didn't fit in with the system. I suppose the fact that during my own youth these were the kids who were my friends has a lot to do with that affinity. Many of the young men in the warehouse crew reminded me of those kids from my childhood and my Jr. High teaching days.

Santa Lucia. After this meeting I got to know Mike one surprise at a time. He was a living testimonial to the arrogant injustice of stereotyping, categorizing, and generalizing human beings. A few days later I was again taking a bike across the alley

for a tune-up. As I approached the warehouse I could hear loud music as usual, only this time it was not the "head banger" alternative rock or rap that I had become accustomed to as the warehouse standard. Instead Mike was playing Pavarotti and he had the entire assembly room staff singing along to the chorus of Santa Lucia.

From that day forward I never knew what music to expect to hear when entering the warehouse. Not only was Mike passionate about music, he was also "omnivorous." He loved music of all kinds. His inventory of tapes and CDs included rock, classical, reggae, punk, hip-hop, rap, alternative, jazz, opera, folk, metal, grunge... Mike said that he liked any music as long as it was "good." And Mike KNEW what was good! Mike's unbridled enthusiasm for music was contagious. It was through his influence that I became a fan of Crowded House, Depeche Mode, Llelo, and even (gasp!) Skinny Puppy.

Will Rogers. I soon came to realize that Mike's enthusiasm wasn't just for music, it was for everything. Over the next year and a half I would experience Mike's enthusiasm for mountain biking,

movies, baseball games, skating (both ice and in-line), skiing, drinking beer, story telling, soft-ball, hockey, cars, photography, camping, eating, dancing, archery, snow-boarding, etc., etc., etc. Most of all I marveled at his amazing enthusiasm and love for people.

Mike and Will Rogers were kindred spirits; he liked almost everyone he met. To Mike everyone was interesting, and he had an insatiable desire to learn from and about each new person he encountered. From Quong, a bike mechanic and recent immigrant from Viet Nam, Mike learned about life in Viet Nam and a native's perspective on the Viet Nam War. From Ramish, an ex school teacher from India, Mike learned about Hindi religion and philosophy and the incredible variety of cultures which make up the Indian mosaic. Mike remembered everything he learned. His talent for mimicry enabled him to acquire phrases in Hindi or Uru from Ramish, in Vietnamese from Quong, and in Spanish from me. He took great delight in using these phrases at every opportunity.

More than any person I have ever known, Mike loved his friends and family "unconditionally." I

don't think I even knew what unconditional love looked like until I met Mike. He took people "warts and all." He celebrated their strengths and accepted their weaknesses without judging. As a teacher I have always tried to do this, but knowing Mike taught me how far I still have to go.

Mike's best teacher. All of these qualities should have added up to a good student, but they didn't. When, in the course of our continuing friendship, Mike spoke of his less than satisfactory school experiences I must confess I was not surprised. Even though he was very bright, insatiably curious, and extremely energetic, I knew that traditional public school classrooms are not accommodating to Mike's kind of energy. In the schools of my own growing up, and some of the schools in which I had taught, the goal would not have been to harness and direct a spirit like Mike's but to break it. For Mike experience wasn't just the best teacher, it was the only teacher.

Over the two years of my master's program Mike grilled me for stories of the places I had been and the lives I had led. In exchange Mike regaled me with

stories of his childhood in British Columbia. They were stories of a crazy kid which seemed to amaze Mike almost as much as they did me.

He also taught me much about both riding and repairing bikes (I learned the hard way that for Mike a mountain bike ride inevitably meant mud and crashes!), hockey (he taught me to ice skate), and music. Oh yes, and nutrition. Once, when I walked into the warehouse with my Circle K hot-dog Mike admonished me, "Lips and assholes, Calhoon; that's what you're eating!" Mike knew what he was talking about; he once worked for Gainers.

Mike lived life flat out. When on occasion Mike's exuberance resulted in "errors in judgment" which caused harm to come to himself or others, he would unabashedly apologize, and he always learned from the experience. He easily sought and took advice when he encountered difficulties.

Dreamer. Mike hungered to go everywhere, do everything, meet everyone, and learn everything in the world. He lived in the present but he hungered for the future. Mike loved to talk about all the things he was going to do. He dreamed very big dreams, and

he was confident that those dreams would one day come true. They would not.

Dying in the Moment

Pause. After completing my master's degree I returned to New Mexico. For the next two years my friendship with Mike went on hold. Actually, it was as though the pause button on a video tape player had been pushed. On one occasion I sent some New Mexico tourist information to Mike, and on another I called him at work to see how he was doing. But mostly, I have to admit, it was "out of sight, out of mind."

I knew when I left Edmonton that I would return to the University of Alberta for my Ph.D. My relationships with the people there had made the experience of my master's degree so positive that I didn't even consider going elsewhere. In fact, it was due in large part to those relationships that I redirected my life in order to make that return sooner rather than later. Therefore, it was with joy and anticipation that I returned to Edmonton in the Spring of 1991 to begin working on my Ph.D.

Play. Once again I took part time work at the bike shop. When I walked in on my first day of work it was as though the intervening two years had not occurred. The "pause" was over; the "play" button had been pushed and my friendship with Mike resumed exactly where it had left off. Oh certainly circumstances had changed: Mike was two years older, he was manager of the assembly shop, and he was deeply committed to and living with Jaki, his childhood sweetheart. But he was still Mike.

Through the summer we spent a great deal of time together. In addition to work, we went to Edmonton Trapper baseball games, on bike rides in the river valley, out for a beer after work, and in the fall Mike continued my skating lessons. When Mike and Jaki moved into a new apartment I was invited to dinner. All of these experiences served to mediate our ongoing conversation.

While we were "sharing the present" Mike began to talk about a dream which involved my future as well as his own. He had decided that the combination of his expertise with bicycles and my knowledge of the ski business could result in a perfect partnership. His

dream involved the two of us owning a sport shop in the mountains, selling and renting skis in the winter and mountain bikes in the summer.

Whenever Mike would talk about this dream I would find myself in an interesting tension: caught between his dream and my own. There was an undeniable appeal in Mike's dream to my love of the mountains and the physical activities of skiing, hiking, and biking. The possibilities in this dream for a very healthy life style were attractive indeed. However, I was firmly and happily on a path toward a dream of my own, that of becoming a university professor.

So strong was this tension that I found myself trying to conceptualize ways to combine Mike's dream with my own. I visualized teaching at the University of Calgary, while living in Canmore and working in "our" ski and bike shop as my schedule permitted. I believe I knew that this would never happen, but I was reluctant to dash Mike's dream. I dreaded the probability of having to do so. As it turned out life, or I should say death, intervened.

Losing his temper. The first symptom of Mike's brain tumor, although I certainly didn't know it at

the time, was anger. One day he said that he needed to talk to me about a problem he was having. He said that he had been losing his temper and fighting with Jaki with increasing frequency. On the weekend things had taken a particularly bad turn. He and Jaki had been at a party and he had had too much to drink. A relatively insignificant disagreement led to him going into a rage and shoving Jaki to the floor. When one of his closest friends tried to calm him down Mike attacked him with his fists. The whole thing frightened him a great deal. He had never been so dangerously out of control; he was worried that he was "going crazy."

His mood swings got worse and he decided to move in with a friend because he was afraid of what he might do to Jaki if his rages continued to get worse. It wasn't long after this that other symptoms began to appear.

Losing his body. First, he began to have trouble reading. He went for an eye exam and began wearing glasses. This didn't really help and he soon realized that he was seeing double; if he closed one eye he could focus fine. By this time, it became apparent

that his eyes were not aligned. His right eye was beginning to point in toward his nose. The medi-center doctor referred Mike to a neurologist.

He continued to come to work every day but soon he began to trip on stairs and have trouble with his balance. A cat scan revealed nothing and they scheduled an MRI. The wait time for the MRI was six weeks and Mike's condition was worsening at an alarming rate. He quickly lost the use of his left hand and arm. When his left leg got so bad that he could hardly walk the doctor was able to get his MRI moved up two weeks. The MRI showed a small possible tumor and Mike was referred to the Cross Cancer Institute.

The doctor at the Cross diagnosed a growing tumor in an inoperable location at the top of the brain stem and he recommended a course of radiation treatments. Mike was to be part of a study on a new procedure where patients receive radiation treatments twice a day for six weeks. Each dose would be at about 75% of the normal daily treatment in traditional radiation therapy. In this way the patient would receive 50% more accumulative radiation than in the one treatment

per day program. The theory was that by dividing the dose the patient could tolerate the higher total radiation.

Mike called me and asked if I would take him for his first treatment, actually he was being x-rayed, cast, and fitted for the apparatus which would be attached to his head for aiming the radiation at the tumor. By this time his eye was totally crossed, his voice was beginning to slur, and he needed assistance in walking. I picked him up at his apartment early so we would get there in plenty of time to find our way around.

The Cross. Mike and I waited in the lobby for his mother to arrive. She was coming on the bus from her west end home. As we waited, we were both ill at ease. Since my father was a hospital administrator and my mother a life long nurse, I had spent my youth around hospitals. But this place was different.

There were no mothers leaving with their brand new babies, no people with their limbs in bright white casts. The Cross Cancer Institute is not a place for appendectomies, tonsillectomies, or hemorrhoid operations. Elective or routine surgeries are not on

the operating room schedules. Neither is it a place for heart bypasses or transplants. Like all hospitals it is a place of life and death but at the Cross, death has an almost palpable presence. Mike felt it, "It's too weird, Dave. It's scary."

When his mother arrived we followed the lines and signs down to the basement and the radiation section. The waiting room was filled with people with shaved heads and Mike looked nervously around. Fortunately, his name was soon called and he looked relieved as he walked away with the nurse.

Mike's procedure took over an hour and his mother and I carried on a somewhat awkward conversation as we waited anxiously for him to finish. It was the first time I had met Mike's mother and I was immediately struck by her strength. There was a sense that Mike might get better by the sheer force of her will. I would come to learn that I was only seeing the "tip of the iceberg" of this woman's amazing strength.

When Mike rejoined us he was noticeably more relaxed, almost upbeat. After two months of getting steadily worse he felt like he was finally doing something to turn things around. When I dropped him

back at his apartment and turned to leave, Mike stopped me and said, "I am going to beat this, Dave!"

Ups and downs. The next seven months were an incredible roller coaster ride for Mike and all of us who loved him. It began with a very dramatic up hill pull. For the first four weeks of the radiation treatment the turnaround was dramatic. Mike's condition quickly and steadily improved. He regained the use of his arm and hand, his voice became steady again and he could once again walk confidently and steadily. His eye had straightened and he looked like Mike again. We were all elated and Mike began making plans for his return to work. The radiation treatments drained him and left him nauseous but he dedicated himself to eating and resting to maintain his strength.

On the first day of the fifth week of his treatment the up hill ended and Mike plummeted. With each dose of radiation he grew weaker. In three days he lost all the gains he had made. By week six it was all he could do to get through each radiation treatment. His hair was gone and the backs of his head and neck were burned black from the radiation. I

began to fear he would die from radiation rather than cancer.

I tried on numerous occasions to talk to the doctor, to seek reassurance as to why the radiation must continue. I asked Mike's mother to authorize the doctor to speak with me about Mike's condition. He refused to talk to me, his nurse explaining that he had talked to Mike's mother but simply had no time to talk to me. I was left with the helpless, and admittedly irrational, feeling that Mike was simply being radiated to complete the procedure as designed.

By the time the last dose of radiation had been administered, Mike was bedridden. The Cross could not admit him so they set him up in a home care program. They delivered a hospital bed to Mike's mother's apartment. The living room was the only space big enough to accommodate it. Since Jaki had to work every day it was logical for Mike to be with his mother. His three sisters, his mother and Jaki worked together to care for him. The home care people delivered meals and medication. Nurses checked on him daily.

Each day when I would ride my bike over to visit Mike, he looked worse. His nausea made it difficult for him to keep his food down, he was having difficulty breathing, and he could hardly speak any more. I was shocked to find how difficult it was for me to make myself go. I began to rationalize that he would be sleeping or that there were too many people there already. But then my guilt would kick in and I would go anyway.

Mike began to have periodic respiratory crises. On the first two occasions they called an ambulance to take Mike to the emergency ward at the Cross. Each time the doctors medicated and then sent Mike home when the crisis had passed. Jaki and Mike's mother pleaded to have Mike admitted to hospital but were refused. The next time Mike went into crisis Jaki packed him into a cab and took him to Misericordia Hospital. There he would spend the last five months of his life.

The Misericordia. We couldn't help but feel better. From his first day at the Misericordia Mike received incredible care. During his initial work-up they discovered that, in addition to the fluid in his

lungs, his blood sugar was nearly at the point of insulin shock. When they brought this under control Mike's condition again improved dramatically.

I began to look forward to my daily visits because each day Mike showed improvement. Hope had returned to his eyes and he again began to speak confidently of his recovery. In addition to the return of his speech he began to regain movement in his arm and leg. Each day he would proudly demonstrate his progress.

A shocking realization. I would bring news of Mike's progress to his friends and associates at the bike shop. The owner, Jerry, told me to tell Mike that everyone looked forward to his return to work, and that since Don, the long time manager of the repair department, was retiring, they were counting on Mike to take his place.

Mike's mother was in the room when I relayed Jerry's message to Mike. She asked Mike if he would like that, being manager of the repair shop. Mike shook his head and said, "No, I am going with Dave. We are going into business together." This hit me like a lightning bolt. It wasn't that I hadn't heard

this "dream" before, but I was shocked to realize that for Mike that dream was still alive. I was even more shocked to realize that if Mike's recovery continued, I would do everything in my power to make that dream come true. But, of course, his recovery didn't continue.

Dying, one day at a time. For the next four months, it was "two steps forward, three steps back." Hope gradually, almost imperceptibly, gave way to resignation. The hospital's care shifted from therapeutic to palliative. And what amazing care it was. I couldn't help but feel thankful that Mike was living/dying in Canada. In the US system Mike's family would not have been able to afford, and Mike would not have received, the level of care that the Misericordia was giving him.

And even more amazing was the care given him by his family. Mike's mother, his sisters, and Jaki combined their efforts to make sure that Mike was never alone. The hospital had provided a small bed so that whoever was spending the night, usually his mother, could do so comfortably. For five months, whenever Mike opened his eyes he always saw someone

who loved him. Their devotion became legend among the hospital staff.

In the middle of this period, Kim and I took a long planned trip to Australia. As we camped our way from Sydney to Melbourne to Alice Springs to Cairns and back to Sydney, I made regular phone calls to Mike. After giving me an update on his condition someone would hold the phone to Mike's ear so I could recount our adventures to Mike. It was so strange to be standing in the middle of the Australian "out back" and, thanks to laser optics and satellites, telling stories to a dying friend half way around the world.

I felt guilty for my absence and prayed that Mike would not die while I was gone. This was totally selfish and motivated by my fear of how guilty I would feel if he died before my return. But then I also felt guilty for having a good time and for being healthy. I even felt guilty for feeling guilty.

Returning to Edmonton did nothing to assuage this guilt. Mike was still bravely hanging on but at great cost. He was on constant intravenous pain medication and glucose, he periodically needed oxygen as his respiratory difficulty was increasing, and he now had

a catheter as he could no longer control his urination. He had lost so much weight he was hardly recognizable. His once muscular arms and legs were like sticks.

I fought back the tears when he opened his eyes and smiled and said, "Hi Dave." Like an idiot I said, "How are you doing, Mike?" "Not so good," was his understated reply. Then he closed his eyes and slipped back into unconsciousness. His mother told me that he mostly slept now. She said that the doctors were all surprised that he was still alive. They said he was too strong for his own good. She said she believed he was waiting for me.

Each day for the next month I rode my bicycle from the university to the hospital and spent about three hours in Mike's room. I would sit with Mike while his mother or sister would go for lunch and a break. After the first week he rarely opened his eyes, and even when he did there was no sense that he was seeing me. His eyes darted fearfully and frantically around the room, as though looking for the exit in a burning theater. Then, without having come to focus on anything, they would close again.

However, even when closed, you could see them moving back and forth as though he were having a nightmare, which indeed he was. Sweat would pour off him and he looked as though he were fighting some terrible internal battle.

August 22nd. I woke up at 6 A.M. as usual. Instead of going to my office to work for a couple of hours as I usually do, I decided to go straight to the hospital. I arrived there at 8:30 and both Mike's mother and Jaki were in the room. Jaki soon left for work and Mike's mother told me that the doctor would be doing an assessment of Mike's condition this morning. The doctor, the respiratory therapist, and two nurses soon arrived. We decided to go for coffee while they did the assessment. When we returned they were just finishing up. The doctor said that Mike was now at the maximum level of pain medication and oxygen. The next step would be a respirator and direct life support, but she did not recommend artificially prolonging the inevitable. Mike's mother agreed. The doctor said that it was only because of Mike's incredible strength and fight that he had survived this long and, since he was in no particular

crisis, he might live another month or more. When I heard this I wondered exactly when it was that I had stopped hoping that Mike would recover and had begun wishing that he would die to end his suffering.

At lunch time I stayed with Mike while his mother went to eat. As usual I sat by the bed and talked to him while I wiped the sweat from his brow. For months we had all continued to talk to him whether he was conscious or not. The doctor had encouraged this and said that there was some evidence that comatose patients might hear and be aware of people talking to them.

I leaned close to him and spoke directly into his ear. I said, "It's okay Mike, you don't have to fight anymore. Do what you need to do, don't worry about us. We love you Mike. If you see a way out, don't be afraid to take it. If you see a door, go through it." Even though at one level I thought that I was crazy, at another level I had become convinced that the reason Mike continued to fight was that he was afraid of disappointing the people who loved him. So I found myself whispering, so that no one else would hear me, into Mike's unconscious ear.

The afternoon passed with visits from his sisters and from Jaki. At one point we were all crowded in the room at the same time. One by one everyone sat at Mike's side stroking his hand and wiping his brow, perhaps because his rapid breathing and troubled face made him seem in particular need of soothing. As the evening approached Mike's people began to leave for home. As usual they would kiss Mike's cheek and say "Goodnight, Mike" before taking their leave.

By 8 PM everyone had left except for Mike's mother and myself. She told me to go on home and get some rest, "You've been here for twelve hours, you must be tired." When I pointed out that she had too, she countered that she would take a nap after I had left. I started to leave but somehow couldn't. I think she sensed what I was sensing. We stood by Mike's bed and continued talking. Finally, a little before midnight, Mike's mother again implored me, "Go on home! Don't worry, I will call you if anything changes. I promise." I reluctantly agreed and, responding to my reluctance, she said again, "Don't worry, I'll call you!"

As I descended in the elevator my anxiety was building. Walking out of the building I looked back up at the sixth floor window, the one under the giant painted "H" for hospital, and saw Mike's mother wave. I waved back and walked to my car. As I drove the Whitemud freeway back around to my apartment near the university, I became increasingly certain that Mike was dying, not eventually but "right now!" I drove faster and faster as I became frustrated and angry with myself for leaving the hospital. When I got to my apartment parkade I ran to the elevator with my heart pounding. I threw open the door to my apartment and bolted for the phone. Mike's mother answered on the first ring and said, "I'm so sorry! He's gone, David. He began gasping just after I turned back from waving to you. I ran back to the window but you were already driving away. It happened so quickly! I'm sorry."

I told her I was coming back to the hospital and she said she would call the family. As I drove I was so angry: angry with myself for leaving the hospital, angry with Mike's mother for making me leave, angry with God for taking Mike, angry with Mike for dying

without me there, and, most of all, angry at my selfish anger. I mean, where did I get off resenting Mike's being alone with his mom when he died? What could be more appropriate? For all I knew, he had been waiting all day for me to leave. I finally began to cry when I had this vision of Mike saying, "Man, Calhoon, I thought you would never leave!"

Matters of Life and Death

> I think that the dying pray at the last not "please," but "thank you," as a guest thanks his host at the door. Falling from airplanes the people are crying thank you, thank you, all down the air; and the cold carriages draw up for them on the rocks. Divinity is not playful. The universe was not made in jest but in solemn incomprehensible earnest. By a power that is unfathomably secret, and holy, and fleet.
>
> (Dillard, 1974, p. 287)

Obligated for a Life

The world is a dangerous place. One of my motives for selecting the three stories which opened Chapter One of this text (Aida in a Yellow Dress, On

Top of the World, and Esperanza Without Hope) was to introduce the idea that for children this is particularly the case. One of my reasons for selecting the three stories that opened this last chapter was to emphasize that our obligations toward children go far beyond simply protecting them from harm and providing for their welfare until they are adults. The nature of a child's future adult life is shaped by their childhood experiences, and their experiences in school play a substantial part in that shaping. It is particularly sobering to realize that the perturbational effects of our presence in the lives of children might even play a part in the nature, and even the timing, of their deaths. As teachers we have to be constantly attentive to the fact that our roles with children involve much more than just their academic preparation for the work place. As teachers our obligation to the child in our presence, and the adult that child will one day become, is always our first obligation.

Paying the Price. We can choose to ignore that obligation but what a price we pay to do so! And, as discussed earlier, we pay a price when we must choose

to advocate for the child in defiance of the parents or the state. In this "real world" tension we must be able to make more than an academic or philosophical argument for this advocacy. In a world of genocidal wars, broken homes, child pornography, slashed budgets for welfare, education, and health, and a global marketplace where child labor is used to boost corporate profits, Caputo's compelling argument in Against Ethics (1993) offers insufficient protection for the vulnerable. In this world children need the protection of universal laws, which in turn requires a language of children's rights. Teachers need their advocacy for children to be supported by the laws of society and not subjected to challenge at every swing of the political pendulum. Both the personal and the global view are necessary.

Educating Other People's Children

Chidren's rights. Every child has the right to an education. I accept this as a given not only because it forms the fundamental basis for my life as a teacher of young children but, even more fundamentally, it is one of the primary assumptions of

my own culture which helped transform me from the five year old child I once was into the adult person I am. In fact, there is very nearly world wide consensus on the child's basic right to an education.

In North America, and much of the world, this right is supported both in law and in practice. In addition, the "right to a free education" forms part of the ten Rights of the Child put forward by the United Nations in 1988. Accepting this right results in the need to determine to whom the correlating duties to provide this education may be assigned. This opens many areas for interesting discussion and debate: the duties of parents, the duties of the state, the relationships and potential conflicts associated with these rights and duties.

Because of their fundamental importance to my life as "teacher," I would like to explore two basic questions: "To whose interests is this education ultimately responsible?" and, "What are the responsibilities, or correlating duties, which fall to the teacher in providing this education?" Underlying this inquiry is my personal belief that not only do certain values inform and shape our lived experience

but also that our lived experience informs and shapes those values.

The next question might be, "What kind of education does a child have a right to?" As teachers, one of our tasks is not only to provide, but to also shape the content and nature of the child's education. On the surface this question might be answered, without provoking too much argument, by a statement such as: Children have the right to an education which provides them with the basic knowledge, skills, and values to prepare them to live a "good life." However, the incredibly contextual nature of knowledge, skills, and values, in combination with the inherent subjectivity of the concept of a "good life," makes this statement very complex indeed. What roles can and must a teacher play in helping children to critically question what a good life might be? As a teacher I have often said that I want to help children to achieve their goals and live their dreams, but is this enough? In a society where the media defines the "good life" as "Life-styles of the Rich and Famous," and where the assumption that more money equals more happiness goes largely unchallenged, what obligation

does a teacher have in helping children to craft dreams which offer possibilities for a better world?

In beginning to deal with this contextual complexity, and in order to find a place where teachers need not stand alone, I find it helpful to go to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child. Although not explicitly connected in this way, all ten of the rights included in this document have implications for the nature of the education a child has a right to. Therefore, let me begin by examining some possible implications each of these rights have for the child's education.

> *The right to protection against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation.* The protection against exploitation seems to suggest the need for an education which equips children to become critically thinking adults. Exploitation is not just child labor; advertising exploits children by preparing them to be consumers of cigarettes, alcohol, designer clothing, etc. This exploitation is hardly benign when it contributes to a world with

children killing other children to steal their Nike Air Jordan basketball shoes.

The right to special care if handicapped. This right has implications for an education which is responsive to the individual needs and characteristics of children and supports exceptional care for exceptional children.

The right to affection, love and understanding. This right speaks strongly for an education rooted in caring and concern for children.

The right to be brought up in a spirit of peace and universal brotherhood. An education which promotes sharing, cooperation, understanding and tolerance is mandated by this right.

The right to be among the first to receive relief in times of disaster. The inherent vulnerability of children results in a moral responsibility to give first priority to the needs of the child.

The right to be a useful member of society and develop individual abilities. An education which both attends to the child's individual needs and prepares the child for life as a socially responsible being in a global community is implied here.

The right to a name and a nationality. This right also supports both the child's individuality and the need for an education which prepares the child to be a valued member of a larger cultural context.

The right to a free education and to full opportunity for play and recreation. Besides making the right to an education explicit, this statement also supports the child's right to a "childhood" with an education which acknowledges and supports the playful nature of children and their learning.

The right to adequate nutrition, housing and health care. Again in this statement the

fundamental needs of the child receive priority, and a role for education in preparing children to meet their own needs in society and as future parents and providers might be implied.

The right to enjoy these rights regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national or social origin. This statement of universality supports an education which both acknowledges and transcends the individual contexts of children's lives.

(Italicized sections quoted from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1988)

Adults' duties. As stated previously, the correlating duties which emerge from these rights can reasonably be assumed to fall to parents, teachers, the state, and society in general. Even though all of these parties might strive to fulfill these duties with the child's "best interest" at heart, their differing conceptions of what constitutes those "best interests" inevitably results in conflicts and in difficult choices for teachers.

For teachers in cross-cultural and multi-cultural contexts this determination of what is in fact in the child's best interest becomes even more problematic. The dangerous arrogance which lies behind the exportation of our educational programs is the arrogance of the assumption that we can know what is in the best interests of others. In my culture we commonly say, "Put yourself in their shoes." We rarely do this. When we say, "If I were you...," what we really mean is, "If you were me...." I tell someone whose employer is exploiting them that, "If I were you I would tell that S.O.B. to go take a flying...." This is a lie. In fact, if I were that "other," with three kids in school and a husband who can't find work, I would do exactly what she does: keep working and keep my mouth shut. Without considering the context of that person (their lived reality, life history and cultural background) I cannot begin to imagine what I would do if I were them. Even when I do my very best to understand that context, I can still only BEGIN to imagine.

Lorraine Code, in her article *The Politics of Care*, speaks to the arrogance of thinking we know:

> Social welfare, which requires an enlightened moral-political epistemology if it is to be enabling rather than degrading, is rhetorically constructed as the mark of a caring society. It fails in its purposes when it is paternalistic in knowing-- when it does not try to discern what is best for its beneficiaries from their point of view, however contestable their point of view may be. Indeed, one of the indicators of privilege in a hierarchically structured society is the capacity to act as a "surrogate knower"... (1994, p. 182)

In spite of this dilemma, our fundamental obligation to the child and our responsibilities as citizens of nations signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child require that we make difficult choices in order to act on behalf of children. As is always the case, our ignorance and the near infinite complexity of these choices require our extreme care and thoughtfulness.

Does equal mean the same? In our democratic society we have attempted to simplify these choices around the notion of equality: equal rights, equal

education, equal opportunity. Perhaps our egalitarian fervor has resulted in the misassumption that being equal means being the same. This has huge implications for cross-cultural education. When I was a child growing up in a segregated school system in Texas, the white government justified the policy as "separate but equal." In fact, the educational systems for blacks and whites were in no way equal. Black schools were shamefully underfunded with facilities and materials grossly inferior to their white counterparts.

The cure for this injustice, bussing black kids to schools across town in white neighborhoods, was only marginally better than the disease. The immediate beneficiaries of forced integration were not the black children. The abuse, both physical and emotional, that many of these children had to endure was deplorable, although rarely deplored by the white administrators. No, the first beneficiaries of integration were the white children, like myself, who had their first opportunity to learn that black people, while in many ways different, were in no way inferior to white people.

This fact was strongly demonstrated to me in 1964 when George Johnson, my black classmate, became the first student in our school's history to be named both Valedictorian and Athlete of the Year at graduation. His sister Georgina reinforced the point a year later by being named Valedictorian of the class of 1965. Certainly, George and Georgina's success was not typical. A hugely disproportionate number of black children floundered in white school programs and the dropout rate was horrific. Thousands of black children paid a very high price in order for white children to learn about equality and justice.

Equal but different. In North American First Nations communities, generations of aboriginal children have paid a high price in demonstrating that the direct implementation of the colonizer's educational system into a cultural context so qualitatively different from that of the immigrant cultures inevitably results in disaster. The far reaching effects on a people forced into a system so culturally inappropriate as to nearly guarantee wholesale failure go far beyond schooling. The

character of Smilla, in Peter Høeg's novel, put it this way:

> Any race of people that allows itself on a scale designed by European science will appear to be a culture of higher primates.
>
> Any grading system is meaningless. Every attempt to compare cultures with the intention of determining which is the most developed will never be anything more than one more bullshit projection of Western culture's hatred of its own shadows. (p. 204)

This statement resonates with these words of Roland Barthes:

> Faced with anything foreign, the Established Order knows only two types of behavior, which are both mutilating: either to acknowledge it as a Punch and Judy show, or to defuse it as a pure reflection of the West. In any case, the main thing is to deprive it of its history. (1972, p. 96)

Perhaps, the reclaiming of their history is part of what drives colonized aboriginal cultures around the world to take control of their own governance and

education. This reclamation may be necessary if their children are to be educated not just to get jobs in the white man's world, but also to live and die well in their own world. If we are to free ourselves from the paternalism of our language and our past we must choose to do so. One of the first choices we must make is to listen to the voices of others and to respect their right to know what is in their own best interests.

The very first piece of writing I did when I began this inquiry in 1991, I realize now, came out of my life long attempt to deal with the sense of shame I feel toward my own cultural heritage. Now, nearing the end of this journey called Ph.D., I would like to offer that first piece of writing again so that I might speak to that person I once was.

Words and Worlds:

> 1965. Stokely Carmichel, famous/infamous black author and civil rights activist, comes to speak at the University of Houston. This institution is in its first year of "integration" and there are few black persons in the audience. These are troubled times (John Kennedy, Martin

Luther King, Malcolm X, Bobby Kennedy...) and the speaker is accompanied by about twenty LARGE black men wearing Malcolm X tee shirts. They position themselves strategically around the stage. I am carried along by the speech and I am impressed by the speaker's controlled passion and his cool logic. The central message, or the message that hammers me, is that the "time is at hand" and that black people in America will be oppressed no longer.

At the conclusion of his talk the speaker offers to take questions from the audience. He fields several questions with skill and persuasion and I am becoming more impressed by the calm power and intelligence of the man. Finally the audience microphone is passed to a tall white student who says, "Suppose we give you what you want...". He never gets the chance to finish the question; Stokely Carmichel erupts.

"Give us what we want!? Listen white boy, you don't have to give us nothing, we're going to take what we want, what is ours, even if we have to take it from you!" The three thousand person

audience explodes into a chaos of cheers, boos, and screamed insults and obscenities as it quickly polarizes. Stokely Carmichel's body guards instantly surround him and escort him from the stage. The police enter and clear the auditorium. My head has been transported to a place from which it can never return.

1988. I am sitting in a small conference room filled with about 40 people. The schedule says that this session is on Native education from a global perspective. I presume that we are all here because of a shared interest in, or involvement with, Native Education. The group appears to be made up of approximately equal numbers of Native Canadians and "whites."

The speaker begins by saying that, although we will be looking at Native education, we will not be talking about "educating" Natives. Rather we will be examining the potential education that Native cultures have to offer the world community. We will attempt to see how aboriginal values and philosophies have much to offer the world by demonstrating ways of living in balance

with nature, ways of sharing the planet without consuming it.

I am intrigued by the theme and impressed by the speaker's poise and apparent sensitivity. He begins with a brief discussion of the history of western colonization of North America. He presents an honest and accurate, although somewhat glib, history of this colonization.

A woman in the middle of the room begins to gesture and try to get his attention. The speaker yields to her and she stands. She speaks with a strong British accent and appears to be about 50 years old. She has only recently come from England and is working with a government agency in Yellowknife. She is angry and begins lambasting the speaker for portraying the British in what she believes is an unfairly evil light. Having the floor she is reluctant to release it until she has explained to us that the British had the best of intentions when they brought civilization to the wilderness.

The speaker states that his intention is not to offend but only to explore the effects of

colonization on the aboriginal peoples of this continent. At this point the British woman interrupts again to state that even if bad things did happen, they happened a long time ago. She could not be held responsible because these things happened long before her birth. She says that she wants to help the Natives. She would help them if she just understood what they wanted, if they would only tell her what they wanted. I am feeling very uncomfortable and wish that this person would be quiet so that the session could continue.

I am relieved when she sits down, but then a young, perhaps 20 year old, woman stands up. She is blond and fair and I think, "Oh no, not another offended white!" When she begins to speak I realize that this is something quite different.

The young woman's voice is strained and her hands are shaking. She says that it is very difficult for her to speak in front of people but that she can no longer remain silent. She says that she is a Native, born on a reserve into a

Cree family. Because of her coloring, she has struggled all her life with her identity. She has heard about the speaker and of his message of a world wide community, and she has come to the conference specifically to hear him speak.

The young woman turns now to face the British woman. The tears are streaming down her face as she tells the British woman that, if she cannot participate in the spirit of this gathering with love and friendship, she should "please shut up!" She is sobbing as she sits down. There is only silence among us now and her's are not the only tear filled eyes.

1991. I am sitting in a class listening to the end of a presentation and discussion regarding a feminist re-reading of Nietzsche. The topic has evolved into a more general discussion of language and feminism. The group has been together for some time and there is a high degree of comfort and candor among the participants. A young man in the group gives voice to his personal confusion over the issues of feminism. I feel a tension developing, at

least in myself if not in the room. My anxiety rises as I perceive the language heading for a trap, like buffalo headed over "Head Smashed In" buffalo jump. He asks the question, "What do we want with this feminist movement?" The woman leading the session asks him who the "we" refers to. When pressed he admits the "we" refers to women. "What do women want?" What is there about this question that has my heart pounding? Is there really tension here or is it just me? I am rescued by my need to leave class to go to work. I don't know if the buffalo were turned around before the jump or not. For me they were not.

Connections. What brings these three incidents together in my mind? Or perhaps the question is better stated, "What is there about this most recent incident that has brought the other two across time and so strongly into my presence/present?" I am intrigued by noting that the middle incident, a "story" I experienced during my master's program, could be connected across 26 years to an incident from my first year

of university. And I am stunned to realize that this transtemporal connection was the result of the little word "want" in the questions, "What do we want? What do women want?"

On reflection I realize that the word "want" didn't accomplish this task alone. It received some powerful assistance from an even smaller word, "we", and the question "Who is 'we'?" If "I" as a man use the word "we" in reference to women what kind of "we" is this. Is it the paternal "we" of the father asking the child, "What toys do we want to play with now?", or the doctor asking the patient, "How are we feeling today?" Or can the use of "we" in this context be indicative of a man in genuine confusion about his role in the desires of women? I cannot know the answer to these questions but the little word "we" compels me to ask.

And now to the word which really instigated this bit of time travel, "want." It seems a harmless enough word meaning to desire or wish for in its more common usages. But it is the language behind this little word that sends me

blasting across the decades. It is the language that is present but unsaid when the word "want" is said aloud. It is a language that said, in 1965, that white people had something that black people "wanted," and that white people could choose to give or not give this "something" to black people. It is a language that said in 1988 that the dominant immigrant cultures of Canada have something that the native cultures "want" and that the natives must say what that "something" is so that it might be given to them. And it is a language that says in 1991 that men have something that women want and that women must make it clear what that "something" is so that men might give it to them.

Must we remain forever trapped by the language of our fathers, the language of kings, slave holders, and Pharisees? Or can we begin to hear behind the words and to throw our words into question? Can listening to ourselves and others change the way we speak? (Calhoon, 1993)

Paternalism. I have come to realize that this shame I feel toward my cultural history has much more

to do with the language of paternalism than it does with my skin color. As a "white guy" whose great grandmother was a member of one of the peoples of the Iroquois Federation, this realization feels personally liberating.

My experiences of the last five years drive me to answer "yes" to the question, "Can listening to ourselves and others change the way we speak?" I have had the opportunity to listen to the words, and the silences, of a great many others during the course of this inquiry. Just as importantly, I have begun to listen to and to question my own words with much greater care than ever before. In attending more carefully to the words I hear, speak, read and write, and in striving to "hear" the words as yet unspoken and unspeakable, my voice continues to change. As my ear grows larger my voice grows softer, and as it grows softer it also grows stronger; in its abandonment of the "loud truth" in favor of the "soft question" I am better able to hear the voices of the others to whom I am inextricably and inexplicably connected by the moment of our shared presence in the world.

The Last Word

As promised in the preface to this document, I would like to close by passing along some messages from those people who have shared their presence and words with me over the course of this journey.

Telling the White Guy

A Cree friend of mine was frequently talking about the great kindergarten program his daughter was involved in on the reserve. I asked if he thought that it would be possible for me to visit and he felt certain that I would be welcomed. I called to arrange a time with the director and felt reassured by her enthusiastic assent. I had read her master's thesis and was looking forward to discussing it with her. So it was with very positive expectations that I arrived at the reserve school next day.

There were three buildings in a row and, not knowing which housed the kindergarten, I entered the middle one. As I always do, I went first to the office to introduce myself and relate the purpose of my visit to the principal. The secretary informed me that the principal was somewhere around the school and that I should just wander around until I found her. I

was doing this, and enjoying looking at the murals painted on the walls of the hallways, when I encountered the stare of a woman of formidable stature. And I don't believe it is just my paranoia which causes me to say that she was looking at me with a "Who the hell are you, and what are you doing in my school?" look. I quickly, and somewhat nervously, introduced myself and told her that my friend had told me that if I wanted to visit reserve schools I should "start with the best one first." Upon hearing the name of my friend her demeanor changed dramatically. It was with a warm smile that she showed me around the school and then invited me back to her office to talk. As it turned out I was in the wrong school. This was the primary school and the kindergarten was next door, separated by a high chain link fence. However, the principal seemed disposed to talk for a while and I was very much interested in what she had to say. We talked about the three schools which were currently Indian Affairs schools but soon to become band controlled. I related my own previous experience with schools undergoing that transition. It became obvious that my friend was held in high esteem by this woman

and that I was benefiting from that relationship in the degree of candor she was granting me. During a discussion of the provincial early childhood initiatives I raised the issue of parent involvement. Wow! I found myself on the receiving end of more candor than I was prepared for. She said that white people were always being critical of native parents for their lack of involvement in their children's education, with the inference that because they are bad parents and don't love their children. She let me know in no uncertain terms that love and concern is never the issue here. It was as though she was speaking to me as a representative of the white education system and there were a few things she was going to get off her chest. Needless to say I was all ears. She said that one of the heritages of the residential schools is a whole generation (or more in some locations) of native parents who struggle severely in their relationships with their children and schools. She said, "Look at me. I was sent away to residential school when I was six and didn't return until I was sixteen, except for two weeks every summer. Where would I have learned how to be a

parent? The nuns sure didn't teach me. I didn't know how to be a Cree parent and I didn't know how to be a white parent. The residential schools are gone but we are still fighting to overcome the damage to our culture: the lost language, the lost traditions, the separation of the elders from the young people."

Cultures in Collision

A couple of winters ago, on one of those rare above freezing January days, fate gave me a crash course in First Nations education. I was driving in downtown Edmonton, hurrying as usual to something so important that it has completely escaped my memory. The traffic light I was approaching changed to red and I moved my foot to the brake. Nothing happened. I applied more pressure as the anti-lock mechanism lifted the brake pedal against my foot. No effect. I pumped gently, as twenty years of driving on snow and ice had conditioned me to do. Still nothing. I knew by then that I was going to crash into the back of the car stopped at the light. I leaned on the horn and my last thought before impact was, "Brace yourselves!"

After the crash I jumped out of my van and ran to the window of my victims' car, praying a silent prayer

that no one was hurt. The two people in the car looked surprised but otherwise in good health. As the man driving opened his door I prepared myself for his anger. Instead he was the absolute picture of calm, the perfect counterpoint to my agitation. I apologized profusely and when I finished I apologized some more. The man just smiled and said for me to relax, that no one was hurt and that was the most important thing.

We moved to the back of his car to survey the damage. What we saw was a classic example of injustice. My van was completely unharmed, without a single scratch. Conversely, the rear end of his car was totally smashed in. My van was new and consequently had one of those huge plastic covered, shock absorbing, ten miles per hour collision proof bumpers. His car was a lovingly maintained ten year old sedan with a shiny chrome bumper now rammed deep into the trunk lid. It probably says something significant about the role guilt played in my upbringing that I wished so fervently that it had been the other way around. It wasn't until much later that I came to appreciate the beautiful irony of it all:

that these two Cree people were innocently going about their lives when a white man in a hurry to get somewhere crashed into them from behind, and due to the white man's superior technology the Cree suffered all the damage.

Wanting desperately to make amends, I assured the man that I would pay for the repair of the car. He accepted this promise with equanimity and we exchanged phone numbers and went on our different ways. A couple of days later he called to tell me he had gotten some estimates and invited me to their house to discuss them. I drove there immediately.

Being a new Canadian with newly acquired car insurance, I was determined not to file a claim with my insurance company. I knew from experience what a collision claim could do to my rates. I was committed to biting the bullet and paying cash for the repair of these people's car even though I suspected that the damage could run over a thousand dollars. How naive I was!

As it turned out, the car I hit belonged to the man's sister who was visiting from Saskatchewan. It would need to be fixed quickly as she needed to return

home soon. The estimates ranged from $2000 to $2800. They seemed oddly embarrassed by the size of the estimates, explaining that they knew that the car could not be sold for that much money, even though it was in very good shape. I explained that I had wanted desperately to avoid an insurance claim but that the estimates exceeded my resources and, therefore, a claim was unavoidable. The woman then said that her brother was a mechanic for Edmonton Transit and capable of making the repairs himself. In addition, she said they had been to Pick a Part auto salvage and the necessary parts were available there at reasonable prices. They estimated that with him doing all of the repairs except for the painting, the total cost might be less than a thousand dollars. I told them I could give them $1500 cash but that I was also willing to submit their estimates to my insurance company. The woman said that we would both benefit from her brother doing the repairs as she could be certain of their timely completion and I could avoid an insurance claim. The deal was done.

By the time I returned from the bank with the money, the man had already removed the bumper and

trunk lid from the car and was using an acetylene torch to cut away the bent framework below the trunk. Our business completed, they invited me to stay for bannock and tea.

My experiences teaching in First Nations communities gave us some common ground for conversation. We even had a couple of acquaintances in common. When they found out that I was teaching in the Faculty of Education at the university the talk became animated. They were eager to tell me that student teachers needed to learn how to teach First Nations children. They said that most white teachers don't know how to relate to First Nations children or to teach them in ways they can understand. The man said that his grandson was a perfect example. The boy had started grade one eagerly enough but soon began to lose interest. He got further and further behind each year and began to be constantly involved in fights which resulted in punishment and eventually suspensions. By grade four he hated school so much that he would pretend illness to avoid going, and by grade five he would often leave the house for school in the morning but wander around the neighborhood all

day instead. This could go on for days before the school notified the family that the child was not coming to school.

In grade six they enrolled the boy in Ben Calfrobe School. The turn around was dramatic. Their grandson now had perfect attendance and had made huge gains in his reading and other subjects. I asked them what they thought was the difference and the first thing they said was, "Respect."

The teachers at Ben Calfrobe showed respect for the boy as a person and respect for the traditions of his Cree heritage. They incorporated Cree tradition into the curriculum, with elders burning sweet grass every morning and performing other ceremonies and, more importantly, they used traditional ways of teaching. Curious, I asked what these traditional ways of teaching were. Storytelling and experience was the simple reply. They said that in the Cree tradition the grandparents educated the children by telling them the old stories, and by showing them how to do the things their lives required. As soon as their age was appropriate to the task they would begin by watching the grandparent and then trying the task

on their own. To me it sounded suspiciously like developmentally appropriate education.

A year after this event, I read in Dianne Meili's Those Who Know this Blackfoot elder's account of education:

> "We understood a whole lot of things had to be integrated to make a whole. A person going through his life changed four times as a child, youth, adult, and elder. Along the way, our people believed in a circular way of thinking- whatever we say will come back to us.
>
> Early childhood was spent learning the language, followed by youth guidance in the thirteen-to-seventeen age range. There was an attempt to hasten mature thought, not necessarily maturity. In Blackfoot terms that meant inform, teach, guide, and encourage. Anytime you were talking to a young person, you applied these four principles." (Russell Wright, in Mieli, 1991, p. 50)

Once again, the term developmentally appropriate came to mind. I also began to suspect that the appropriateness of the things these people had to say

about education may not be limited to First Nations children.

More Knowing Voices

During the last two years of this inquiry, my travels have taken me to First Nations communities from the foothills of Alberta to the Yukon Territory. Along the way I have shared words and presence with First Nations people who were both parents and educators. They were eager to speak about their teaching and their hopes for the education of their children. Part of this speaking resulted in some very specific recommendations regarding education in First Nations communities. These voices together offer a vision of an education which might hold promise for First Nations and non-First Nations children alike.

Non-competitive environment. A First Nations woman who has been teaching for 26 years at a foothills reserve school spoke of a non-competitive environment where children are evaluated only in relation to their own growth and where the expectations for that growth are high. She said that the teacher should never yell at children but speak softly, showing respect for children as individuals.

Two other First Nations teachers joined her in stressing cooperative learning strategies.

Culturally grounded curriculum. Every teacher and parent I spoke with stressed the need for native language curriculum and the primacy of the First Nations perspectives on history and the environment. In addition, the inclusion of First Nations spirituality was viewed as necessary in order to support the interconnectedness of all living things which gives children their place in the world. The traditional stories were viewed as important for this. Teaching the whole child, "mind, body and spirit," was emphasized by one teacher.

Community involvement. The use of elders and other human resources from the community was advocated by all the teachers and parents. Local people to teach crafts, native language and life skills were among the suggestions.

Individualizing curriculum. Almost everyone I spoke with expressed the need to treat children as unique individuals and relate learning to that individuality. Three teachers used the term "individualizing curriculum" to refer to a practice of

tailoring learning experiences to the individual interests and talents of children.

Experiential learning. All of the teachers also stressed the need for learning by doing. The use of manipulatives and artifacts and integrating art, crafts, music and dancing into the other subjects were among the suggestions.

Collaborative teaching environment. Two of the First Nations teachers, a first year teacher in a reserve near Edmonton and the 26 year teacher in the foothills reserve, spoke persuasively about the need for cooperation and collaboration among school staff. They felt that this was particularly necessary when modifying or creating curriculum to make it more culturally relevant.

Respect

I could not count the number of times, over the last five years, that I have heard the word "respect" uttered by First Nations people from New Mexico to Canada to Alaska. No matter what dictionary you choose, the definitions of this word, when considered in relation to teaching, will overwhelm you ("in relation to" by the way is one of those definitions).

Interestingly, none of those definitions support the notion that a teacher could "demand" or "command" respect from their students. In fact, demanding and commanding are antithetical to respect. It seems to me that the First Nations people I have had the honor to call friends take the notion of respect to the grounding of presence. In doing this they eschew a modern view that respect can be demanded, and even the almost capitalistic/transactional view that respect must be "earned," in favor of a respect that, like everything else of real value, always comes as a "gift."

Just Plain Good Teaching?

Do the combined voices of these people speak only of what is "good teaching" in First Nations communities? Perhaps the particularity of their experience can connect with all our lives by reorienting us toward our own experience. I would like to close this chapter with some wisdom from a person whose perspective is uniquely broad in ways relevant to this inquiry. He was born and raised on a far northern reserve and he and his wife went on to

teach school in several Canadian First Nations settings while raising their family. Eventually, he took a graduate degree and is currently director of a First Nations teacher education program at a northern college.

In discussing the process of preparing teachers to teach in First Nations settings he stated his belief that, "Teachers who are successful in Northern First Nations communities will be successful teachers in any setting." While acknowledging the subjectivity of his use of the word "successful," he went on to say that the reverse of this was not the case; teachers who were successful in southern non-First Nations communities would not necessarily be successful teachers in First Nations settings.

Since our personal feelings on this were in agreement, our discussion moved to speculating on why this might possibly (with an emphasis on "possibly") be the case. The interesting question we were left with, and I would like to now leave with you, was this: "Could it be that while First Nations children are responsive to developmentally and culturally

appropriate learning activities, they have low cultural tolerance for poor teaching strategies?"

Epilogue

Standing in the Light of Possible Futures

> I cannot cause light; the most I can do is try to put myself in the path of its beam. ... The secret of seeing is to sail on solar wind. Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff. (Dillard, 1975, p. 35)

Researching the Present Through Story

The word "epilogue" comes from the Greek "epilogos" meaning to speak or write over. Having written and re-written this document, it feels appropriate to now "over write" the experience of this dissertation by returning to the question which gave it birth, "What might it mean to stand in the world as 'teacher?'" In a more traditional thesis format this process might resemble a section on implications for further research. If I view research as carefully searching again for something that remains concealed, then this epilogue might fulfil this role.

To do this I would like to look once again at "the present" and offer what for me were the key insights I gained through this ongoing journey. I offer them not as "truth" but as notions which I suspect I will continue to "re-search" in the living out of my life as teacher. With these notions I would like also to share the words of some of the people who have spoken deeply to me, rekindling the passion which sustains and directs my life.

Learning in the Present

The present is the most powerful learning space we can inhabit. We are born into it, and being in it enables us to learn more in the first five years of our lives than we will in all the rest of our life. We, perhaps necessarily, teach children how to leave this space and we should also support them in returning to the "present" as the place where learning connects to the world:

> "The principle of experience contains the infinitely important element that in order to accept a content as true, the man himself must be present or, more precisely, he must find the content in unity and combined with the certainty

of himself." (Hegel, Encyclopedia, in Gadamer, 1975)

The present is the birthplace of experience which opens the door to a notion of life long learning as a way of living, not just a product of professional development.

Listen to how this passage from Truth and Method resonates with the passage from Annie Dillard which opened this epilogue:

> The perfection of his experience, the perfect form of what we call "experienced," does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its own fulfillment not in definitive knowledge, but in that openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself. (Gadamer , 1975, p. 319)

These two passages speak so strongly to the teacher in me! What higher goal could I have for my teaching than to help children learn to better orient themselves as a "sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff" of the "solar wind" of experience (Dillard, above).

People Who Know Differently

All the modern world's efforts to the contrary not withstanding, First Nations and aboriginal peoples remain connected to the present, and through the present to the world, in some very fundamental ways. Because of this, they offer a rich resource on ways of being in the world which might open possibilities to a better world for all living things. John Farella contrasts two Navajo brothers and presents a view of two different orientations toward the world:

> So you have each brother pursuing one side of the human coin. The one seeks acceptance and the other control. The one accepts his powerlessness over human events, and the other seeks power. The one assumes that his knowledge of what is will always be limited and that if he attempts to control something at one point, there will always

> be unforseeable ripples somewhere else. The other assumes that if he only knows more, tries harder, he can force his will onto the world. In acknowledging this powerlessness the one brother begins to look at knowledge and understanding differently, trying to understand how the world works, the meaning of it all, looking at the pattern rather than only focusing on the things he can manipulate and control.(1993, p. 162)

On the surface this sounds like a contrast between the modern and postmodern, an arrogant irony which tries to name and lay claim to a world view that preceded the time when people first began giving names to ways of thinking the world.

Story as a Way of Knowing

Finally, or perhaps you are thinking "Finally!," I would like to leave you with the notion that story is much more than narration. I have always used story in my teaching. Indeed, using stories to teach is a practice as old as human culture itself. The Eurocentric view has long accepted story as a way to teach values or morals through parable or allegory. The use of the metaphorical to establish parallel

signifiers of a common signified is a practice with which Western culture is both familiar and comfortable. In addition, the practice of using story in attempting to "open" experience to analysis is evident in many human science methodologies.

Because my teaching life has taken me into First Nations communities from Alaska to the Mexican border, I have had the opportunity to witness story used in ways not traditional in my own culture. In my ongoing inquiry into story and culture I have become convinced that, in today's postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial landscape, story must play many different roles.

In this thesis I have shared some stories, mostly autobiographical, and explored the power of story to disrupt and de-stabilize, to open questions rather than deliver meaning. I have attempted to call into question the reification of story as the representation of experience, and in allowing the stories to jar against each other, without analysis or explanation, I have sought to explore ways in which a metonymic notion of story forces us to re-orient ourselves toward the abyss and the infinite

possibilities of our existence. These words from a book called The Need for Story speak to these ideas:

> Perhaps in the end, we need our stories to give us hope. They help us see possibilities, they give us what we need to envision a transformed future in which learners have satisfying social relationships, make sense of print, all see themselves in the world around them--in the dolls they favor, the books they choose, and the stories they tell, hear, read, write, perform. (Genishi, 1994, p.243)

At one time I had hopes that I could write a dissertation which was all story. This seems possible to me because of my belief that in the stories of people's presence in the world live all the concepts and theories and patterns of our existence. This notion has some support in these words of Shirley Bryce Heath:

> Scholars in several disciplines have repeatedly noted that, for adults, stories are theories; they need not be replaced by abstractions or explanations. ... Mink, a philosopher and literary critic ..."Narrative form as it is

> exhibited in both history and fiction is particularly important as a rival to theoretical explanation or understanding." (1987, 185)

However, in the end I lacked both the skill and the courage to attempt this. I leave it for my future "research."

As for the wound in my history and my culture, it remains open. My stories cannot heal it any more than my anger and pain could heal Mike's cancer. This is the humility I cannot and should not avoid. Leaving the wound open might in the end allow it to heal without infection.

Let me end with a last quote from The Pilgrim at Tinker Creek which so greatly helped me to shed the anger and frustration at the death of my friend, Mike:

> ...the point is that not only does time fly and do we die, but that in these reckless conditions we live at all, and are vouchsafed, for the duration of certain inexplicable moments, to know it....These are our few live seasons. Let us live them as purely as we can, in the present. (Dillard, 1974, p. 275)

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